May

25¢

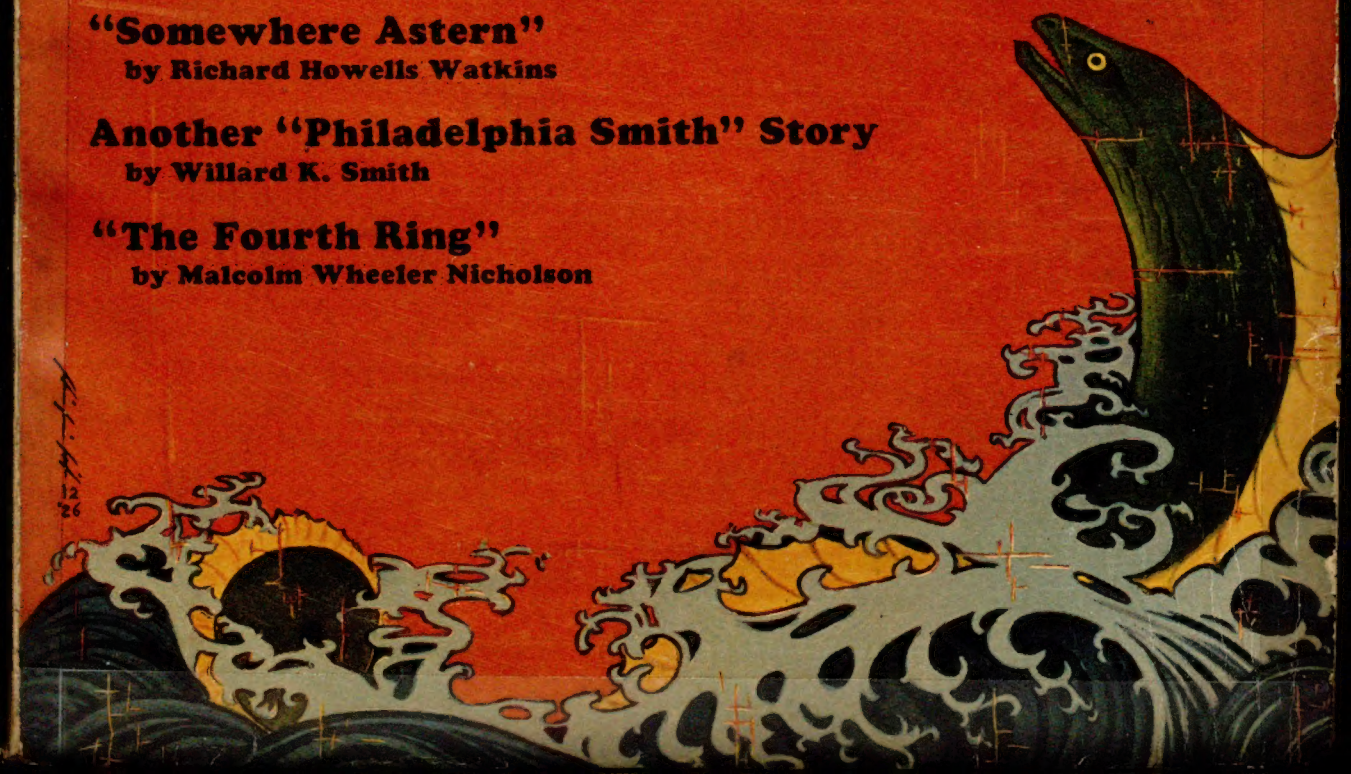
MYSTERY MAGAZINE

Good Stories Well Told

"Somewhere Astern"
by Richard Howells Watkins

Another "Philadelphia Smith" Story
by Willard K. Smith

"The Fourth Ring"
by Malcolm Wheeler Nicholson



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ROBERT SIMPSON, EDITOR

Volume XI Number 2

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Around the Corner

IN THESE days of highly competitive magazine making, one of the most prevalent circulation building ideas seems to be that of offering a prize for a best novel. These prizes are rich and tempting and the young idea is invited to shoot for the moon.

Of course, there is nothing new in this. Nature foisted the competitive urge upon us as a stimulant toward greater effort in every direction, and competitions for prizes have always been with us.

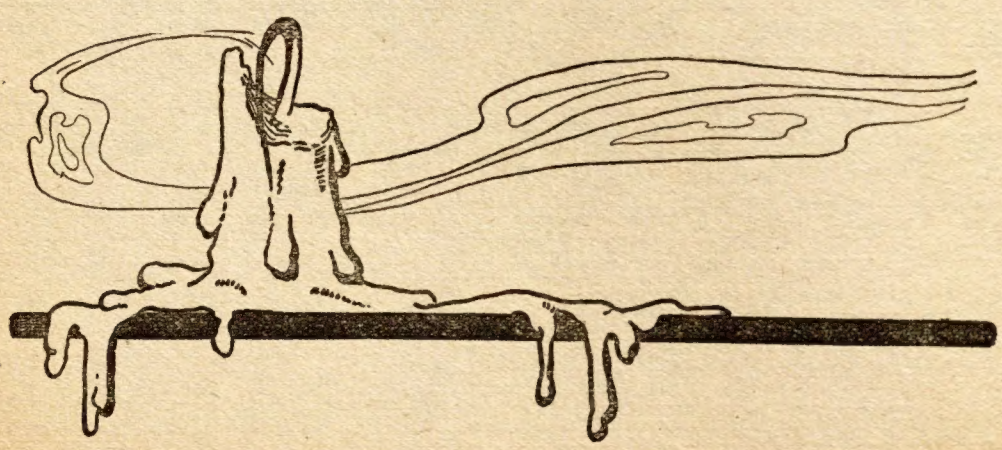
It would be rash to say that best novel competitions are valueless. But, aside from the fact that they must absorb an appalling tonnage of good white paper, there is a suspicion lurking in my mind that their benefits are largely overrated.

In the arts particularly, prize-winners, like infant prodigies, are notoriously disappointing. They have a rocket-like tendency that is bright and spectacular enough while it lasts, but the stick that comes down to earth again must have a rather unpleasant time of it.

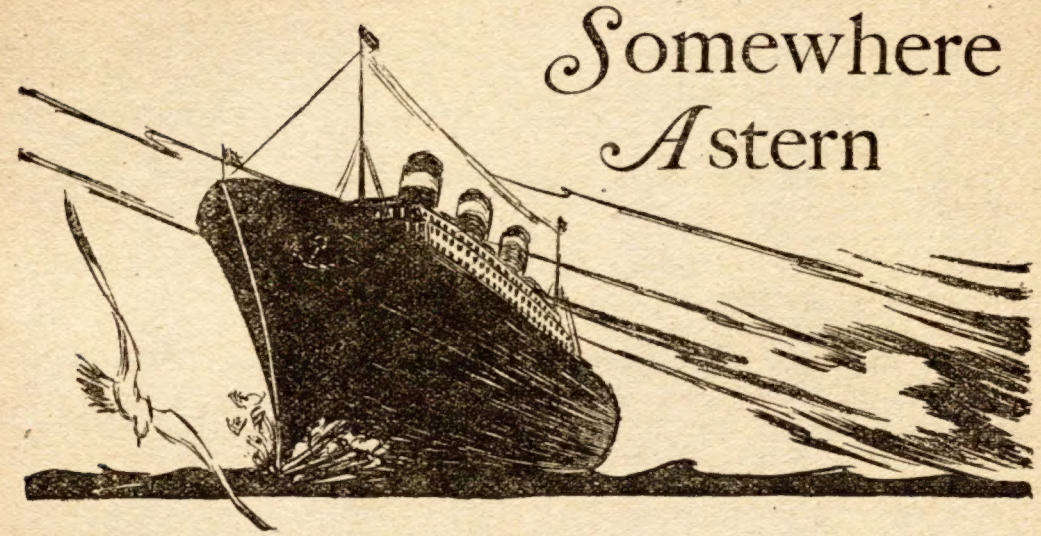
If there is a moral in this, I hope the young writer will accept it for whatever it is worth. The old-timer doesn't need it. He has built his house and its foundations are laid on the rocks of patience and perseverance. And while his head may still mount into the clouds now and then he is always careful to see to it that his feet keep assuring contact with old Mother Earth.

If you must write a prize-winning novel, write it by all means. But don't let yourself think, when the money is making a pleasant and comforting sound in your pockets, that your luck is literature.

THE EDITOR.



Somewhere Astern



By RICHARD HOWELLS WATKINS

THEY made the boat at Southhampton, the three, but it was a close call. The forty other passengers had long since straggled aboard; only the inevitable final incidents kept the *Scava* at her pier.

Just one of the tardy trio, a young man who appeared to be a gentleman and who was dressed as such, maintained his self-possession. The other two, a girl in her assortment of finery, including an incongruous Paris hat, and the middle-aged man, with his big chest bulging in a ready-made suit, scrambled up the steep gangway in a frank panic.

But the younger man, Barbisson, halted beside the automobile that had carried them to the dock, drew a billfold leisurely from his pocket, and paid the driver. He was liberal, for the man touched his hat.

Ignoring the stewards who were picking up the bags, Barbisson ascended to the ship with an unhurried step. In his left hand he carried an attache case.

At the top of the gangplank the other two were hovering furtively to join him. He led them aft at once to a position where they were divided by a dozen feet at least from the nearest passengers.

"Heavens!" the girl exclaimed, with a gasp. Her name, the passenger list was later to assert, was Mrs. Smiley, and Barbisson, of course, was Mr. Smiley. "That was a near one, that was. I thought my heart was goin' to thump right through my coat."

"We ain't clear yet," said Taggart, the man of middle age, peering apprehensively over the rail. "What'll we do if he comes now, Barb?"

He looked with expectation and some confidence at the tall young fellow who was staring at the gangplank. The trembling girl, too, raised her eyes to him. Barbisson

was quite obviously the leader of that queer party.

"If he comes?" repeated Barbisson. He straightened his shoulders a trifle, touched his well-chosen necktie with thin, agile fingers, and spoke softly:

"Meet the gentleman, of course."

"Ah, you can have that, with pleasure," murmured the girl. Her soft brown eyes admired him openly. "But I'll bet you'd meet him bold an' easy, if we did come to it."

"Well, we ain't coming to it," Taggart announced with sudden relief. "There goes the plank up now. Next stop, Africa!"

The gangplank was indeed being lifted clear and lowered to the dock. The clatter of the donkey engine seemed to arouse Barbisson to action. He darted a glance at the pair.

"Get away from the rail!" he commanded, and his two companions leaped instantly to obey. His eyes glinted with satisfaction at this evidence of their subservience.

"Did—did you see him?" the girl asked breathlessly, as they retreated to the other side of the ship.

"No, but this is no time to take chances, Pearl," Barbisson said curtly.

"Well, we're all right now, aren't we?" demanded Taggart rather aggressively. The whistle was pouring out its thunderous farewell above them, and under their feet the *Scapa* was stirring to life.

Barbisson laughed quietly. "Apparently you're not well acquainted with the gentleman, Jim."

The laugh or the words chilled Jim Taggart.

"I know him," he muttered. He whipped out a packet of cigarettes, tapped one on his unclean fingernails, and stuck it between his thick lips. "Yeah, I know him, all right."

Pearl shuddered. She peered around the corner of the smoking-room for just an instant. Her eyes held terror, and something of guilt.

"He can't get on the boat now," she asserted. "We're safe now, aren't we, Barb? He can't get at us at all, can he? Lord, when I think of what he done to Hackett just for a matter of holding out—— And look what we done to him!"

"Never mind that!" said Barbisson sharply.

He turned to confront her, his eyes half closed in a frown, and his rather small jaw firmly set. "Are you sorry you came—do you want to be set ashore? Perhaps I can manage it."

"No! No!" said the girl, and her voice was high and tremulous. Her eyes appealed to him without pride. "Lord, no, Barb! You—you don't mean that!"

"No, I don't mean that," Barbisson said, less severely. "It's all right, Pearl. You go down to the stateroom now and get ready for lunch. And Jim, you'd better make sure the stewards have taken our luggage below."

His arm, behind the girl's shoulder, impelled her gently toward the door leading into the ship's public rooms. She went obediently.

JIM TAGGART lingered behind, eyeing the attache case. "How about that?" he asked.

Barbisson's face contracted in sudden anger.

"Don't you trust me any longer?" he demanded. "You let me carry this all the way from his place, didn't you?"

"Sure I trust you," Taggart protested hastily, waving his cigarette widely in a gesture of confidence. "I just thought maybe——"

"I'm giving this to the purser to

keep for us," Barbisson said coldly.

"The purser!" Taggart's face was blank for a moment; then he grinned. "The purser! Say, that's a hot one, ain't it? The purser!"

He laughed loudly, forgetting his fears.

"It is not a hot one," Barbisson rebuked. "And for Caesar's sake, Jim, act like a first-class passenger, not like an inmate of the upper tier. There is a limit to the uncouthness that a European will regard as natural in an American. Of course we give our valuables to the purser. Why not?"

"That's right," Taggart agreed. "I reckon that other line of yours was a knock, but we'll pass it. I'm sticking by you, professor. I wouldn't ha' had the guts to pull this stuff without you. At that I'm feelin' sort of cold an' lonely now, so you don't have to be afraid I'll do anything raw."

"Afraid!" Barbisson said disdainfully. "Any time you think I'm afraid——"

"Don't jump on a guy so!" Taggart objected. "I'm trying to be amiable, ain't I? Why all the bawl?"

"Go down and look after the bags," Barbisson commanded harshly.

Taggart slouched away, grumbling.

Barbisson, his jaw thrust out sternly, watched him go. Then he walked to the stern of the ship. Half concealed by the steering-engine house, he stood looking at the busy docks of Southampton, and the ships roundabout.

"Many ships!" he murmured approvingly. "Dozens—scores of them—and going everywhere in the world. He'll have his hands full—if he should trace us here." His mood changed as always, abruptly. "But—he's a clever devil. Nothing would stop him. He'd singe in Hades forever to get square with me."

He turned hastily from the docks and walked forward, looking down placid Southampton Water at the seaplanes winging over the government air base at Calshot Castle, and then letting his gaze wander on to the pleasant Isle of Wight.

The *Scapa* swung around the corner and into the Solent. Little groups of passengers—the usual varied lot found on a cheap ship bound for the colonies—gathered to view the yachts at Cowes.

Barbisson strode up and down the deck alone. His head was bent to inspect the planking beneath his feet, as if he feared pitfalls in it.

Down the broad, green-bordered arm of the sea the *Scapa* steamed, her bulk magnified, her steadiness intensified, by the swarms of lighter craft, yawls, sloops, and cutters, that fleeted with white wings from her path.

Barbisson tramped on, now and again raising his eyes to the diminishing prospect astern.

"Safe!" he thought. "Safe! Now I can enjoy myself. Money, Pearl, a straight life again, and nothing, practically nothing, to fear."

With relief and a certain complacency he turned to the bow where, beyond the Needles, was the open and illimitable sea.

THE *SCAPA* had left Europe but not the northeast trades behind, and now, on a day of flying gray clouds and spray-lashed decks, was working southward. Occasionally a comber bigger than its fellows would crash upon her port quarter, but the *Scapa* took this steadily enough, as in the day's work.

Barbisson, coming into their stateroom after an idle tour of the decks, found Pearl still clinging to her

berth, as she had done ever since the weather had roughened. She was no longer suffering from mal de mer, but rather from a difficult mood.

"Is the storm getting worse?" she demanded, as he stood looking down at her.

"No, better," he replied. "Don't you feel like getting up for a bit today? The air will do you good."

His voice was coaxing, but the girl moved her head impatiently on the pillow.

"I don't want to get up," she said sullenly. "I don't like this boat. Those flossy janes are too upstage for me."

"No, they aren't," he insisted, against his own observation. "That's just their ordinary manner—a sort of aloofness toward strangers. It's an English trait."

"They high-hat me all the time," Pearl insisted. "What's the good of going up and looking at frozen faces all around? Do they suspect I ain't got a wedding ring, or what?"

"They don't suspect anything of the sort," he answered, a bit sharply.

"Well, I'm goin' to stay down here."

"All right," he said, and put a hand on the door knob.

"Wait a minute, can't you!" she said querulously and raised herself on her pillow. He came back to the side of the berth and she took his hand in hers and looked at it with face down-turned.

"I don't want to be a Crusoe for the rest of this trip, with nobody but you and Jim to talk to. Barb, I been thinking—if I showed up at dinner one night with some of that stuff on—that little emerald pendant, say—maybe they'd thaw out some."

"No!" he said instantly. "Are you mad? Or are you set on getting us into—trouble?"

"It's tough that I have to be a prisoner in a dinky little stateroom on a bouncing boat for the rest of my life," Pearl whimpered. "It's giving me the willies, it is. I keep thinkin' of—Moodry. What if he caught us, Barb?"

He made a gesture of exasperation. "You're not a prisoner. It's your own choosing that you're down here instead of up on deck enjoying the voyage," he said angrily. "And as for Moodry—forget him!"

"I wish to God I could forget him," the girl muttered. "But he isn't so easy to forget. I could forget a rattlesnake on my chest easier."

He did not answer. He strode to the door, flung it open, and left her. He made his way back to the promenade deck, but the sight of the gray waves following the boat with inexorable patience did not dispel his anger.

"A nice, spunky sort of girl to be tied up to for years—for heaven knows how long," he mumbled resentfully.

At the smoking-room door he paused. Then he entered. Jim Taggart was sitting alone at one of the tables, motionless, staring at a whisky glass in his hand. Barbisson hesitated, but finally moved across the room and sat down opposite him.

Taggart, with the furtive expression that consorted so poorly with his broad build and great muscles, looked up. He nodded drearily and glanced across the room at the only other occupants.

"Have a drink," he said in a low, husky whisper. "I just been thinkin'—of Moodry. D'ye think we covered our tracks pretty well?"

"Another one!" Barbisson exclaimed irritably. "Pearl's down below shivering in her bunk and thinking of Moodry. You haven't the nerve of a pink mouse between you."

Taggart displayed no resentment. After a quick glance at his companion he turned his eyes back to the glass his hand encircled on the table.

"Maybe that's so," he said in a flat voice. "Nerve is funny. You know me. You know I've held up my end fine on some pretty big things, with Moodry behind me. Even in England, where the cops don't carry guns and the banks keep their cash behind a counter that a kid could hop over, it took some nerve to get that ice necklace that's in your bag.

"But that was with Moodry backin' me. I was a good deal more scared of Moodry and that armor-piercin' eye of his and that mouth that looked like a knife cut in his face, than I was of anything a bobby or a judge could hand me. I always felt with him behind me that the only thing I could do was go ahead, that he would come down on me, pounce on me like—like something awful—if I didn't."

Taggart shivered, and twisted his head half around, to look behind him. "I feel that way now," he said, reverting to his husky whisper. "Ready to pounce—with them long fingers curved like claws near my throat."

"You're hysterical or drunk," Barbisson said sharply. "Moodry's back in England, mad as a hornet, maybe, but we're well beyond his sting. We're hundreds of miles away from him, man, and he hasn't a clue to go by."

"So you say," muttered Taggart. He licked his lips. "He has long fingers, Moodry has, and he likes to use 'em. And I remember that thin, twisted smile o' his, that he'd use when we thought he was stopped by something, as if he and the devil had a joke together."

"Nonsense," repeated Barbisson, though the picture left its impress in his mind.

"Moodry's a funny one—different," Taggart insisted. "I can tackle any other guy, feeling that he's about as scared as I am, or worse, but Moodry, he ain't afraid. He'd fight with guns for the sport of it, same as he's flown airplanes, and shot lions, and robbed banks. He ain't afraid, and when he's crazy mad he'd go up against an army. He was that way when he killed that cop in New York."

"He has hypnotized you," Barbisson said in disgust. "Forget him; we're through with him now."

Jim Taggart shook his head slowly.

"Through nothing!" he replied. "He isn't giving up yet. We done something nobody ever done before, gypped him good, and you took Pearl away from him, too. He's going to do some work to find us—and when he does——"

He lifted his glass and drained it. No color flooded into his face after the drink and no courage into his eyes. He looked about for the steward.

Barbisson stared at the man disdainfully.

"Look here, Jim," he said. "Maybe Moodry is looking for us still. But did you ever stop to consider who he'd want to settle things with —me—his trusted right-hand, who took Pearl and planned the whole thing—or you, who simply came along obeying orders?"

"He'll square things with you first, if he gets a chance, but he won't forget me, or Pearl, either," Taggart replied doggedly.

"Not at all," said Barbisson. "Once he gets his hands on me he'll devote his talents solely to me, un-

less you happen to be within reach, too."

He paused, leaned forward across the table, and eyed his ally intently.

"Now, Jim, if you're so frightened of Moodry and his vengeance why don't you cut loose from us? Alone you'll be safe; with us you'll share what I get. This boat makes several ports before it puts in at Cape Town. You can land at——"

"No!" said Taggart. His voice was quick with apprehension. "I'm staying with you. Alone, I'd be scared to close my eyes. I'd be afraid I'd wake up and find him beside me, or feel him behind me.

"You knew Moodry better than any of us, and you weren't afraid to gyp him. Well, I threw in with you, and now I'm goin' along with you, and it's you that faces Moodry, if he ever finds us. You're my boss now. I'm dependin' on you, Barb; I couldn't pull a trigger with him lookin' at me."

Barbisson rose.

"Damn cowardice!" he said scorchingly.

Taggart shrugged his shoulders. "Call it anything you like; that's how it is," he muttered. His hand closed around his glass again, and he beckoned to the steward.

BARBISSON turned from him. His eyes passed with resentment over the jolly little group who were having such a good time in a corner of the room. He went out onto the deserted deck.

Up and down he paced, and when he came to the stern he stopped and looked back over the whitecaps. He could see nothing of land or other ships; nothing but the restless, cresting seas, that finally joined the sullen gray of the sky miles back behind the ship. Beyond that meeting of sky and sea was England—and Moodry.

Moodry!

The man who exerted such a sinister influence over the minds and spirits of his two companions in flight was hundreds of miles astern, unaware of their whereabouts, not even thinking about them, perhaps.

With a sudden shudder he retracted that last thought. Moodry would be thinking of them, working to find them. His wrath would be under the ruthless control of his will, but it would be flaming, undiminished by time, ready to pour out upon them when his chance came. The fear of Moodry, insensate, ravening, was what ruled his subordinates in his pernicious enterprises, not loyalty or hope of gain.

It had been idleness, poverty, and an impulsive theft, poorly planned, that had thrust Barbisson into that crew. Moodry had rescued him from prison—for a purpose. And of all those formidable and desperate men only he had dared to break his shackles and array himself against his chief.

He had planned carefully this time, and he had planned well. For weeks he had been working secretly on Pearl and Taggart, undermining Moodry's hold on them. Pearl had yielded to love, Taggart to greed.

Barbisson's swift coup, executed with the aid of the other two, had netted wealth in its most convenient form—jewels. And it had taken from Moodry, as well, two of his most complaisant and valuable tools. A four-fold blow, that. Three of the gang, and much of the loot—a blow, stunning to Moodry, and most soothing to Barbisson's self-esteem. Barbisson, too, could lead.

Moodry would know that now.

Barbisson's mood of satisfaction was of brief duration. He frowned.

These followers of his seemed to be falling under the spell of fear again, fear of that faraway man whom he, Barbisson, had so crushingly defeated.

They refused to heed his words, to follow his counsel. They stared into vacancy and seemed to see in it the figure of Moodry, pursuing, vengeful.

Barbisson glanced contemptuously astern. Let Moodry follow if he wished; he would meet him. He pressed his left arm against his side and felt the comforting bulk of his automatic.

Turning his back on the taffrail, he walked forward. But he had not gone more than twenty paces when he stopped and looked over his shoulder as the ship rose under him.

High the *Scapa* reared, as the wave got under her keel. Barbisson, gazing backward through eyes half closed in the intensity of his scrutiny, saw the wilderness of water, but nothing else. There was nothing there astern, nothing but water. Let Moodry think, let Moodry rave, if he would. It was all that he could do.

He turned and walked with determined steadiness to the very bow of the boat. Ahead, as at the Needles, was the open and illimitable sea.

THE *SCAPA*, her screws flailing the water with a persistence man-made but seemingly perpetual, put the equator behind her. From 51 degrees north latitude the unceasing propeller had driven her down to the line, and now, with unfailing, unhurrying beat, was adding degrees of south latitude to her reckoning.

The nights were ablaze with strange stars—stars unknown to England, and to Moodry.

Barbisson, in a mood of sudden exultation on one of those utterly still and remarkably beautiful tropic nights, waylaid Taggart as he scuttled across the deck toward the smoking-room and the table that had become his by right of constant occupation.

"Come with me, man!" Barbisson commanded, taking him by the arm. "Why immure yourself in there on a night like this? Come!"

Reluctantly, almost sullenly, Jim Taggart trod the way aft with him.

"Look!" said Barbisson, when they had come to the stern. He waved a hand at the creaming wake, and then up at the unfamiliar stars. "Why are you so sulky and so fearful? Do you know how many hundreds of miles Moodry, in England, is astern?"

"It's on the chart in the smoking-room," Taggart said harshly. He looked at the black water behind the whiteness of the dying wake and shivered, though the air was balmy. "England's astern, but Moodry's coming fast enough. He's coming!"

With a sudden, convulsive movement he freed his arm from Barbisson's grip and hurried forward toward the lights and people of the ship.

Barbisson stared after the man, and then out over the water behind them. A waste of water, nothing more, and yet there had been something most disquieting in Taggart's declaration.

Moodry was there, somewhere astern, and even now he might have solved the question of their whereabouts. Even now he might be pursuing, closing up on them with inexorable speed.

The *Scapa* was by no means the fastest ship on the run and, moreover, she put in at several ports before Table Mountain raised its cloud-wreathed head to their view. Moodry

might be coming up astern in a fast mail boat.

He concentrated his gaze again upon the sea that had so moved Jim Taggart. Nothing—nothing but starlight, and an ocean that lay black and supine, save when some ripple of wind raised enough swell to send points of light from its curving crest up into Barbisson's eyes. Had he been as clever about concealing their movements as he might have been? Would Moodry fail to read his strategy?

"Perhaps we should have taken the mail boat," he murmured, uneasily. "It would have gotten us from Southampton to Cape Town in seventeen days. But this ship seemed less likely to attract his attention. I was right; I know I was right."

The spreading wake of the *Scapa*, that register of distance being traversed, gave him no comfort now. Thought of the mail boat, funnels streaming the black banner of speed, bows cleaving the ocean in twain for daring to oppose her progress, and a creamier wake kicked astern by twin screws, came to torment him.

Out of the darkness beyond the taffrail crept a menace as palpable as a storm cloud. Moodry would come —was coming now, perhaps. There were no lights astern, but that did not mean he was not there, just below the horizon, ready to creep up on him while he slept.

"I'm becoming as jumpy as an old woman," he murmured fretfully. "It's these two spineless creatures, a woman afraid of the future and a man afraid of the past, that are getting under my skin. I'll have to buck them up somehow."

The responsibilities of leadership, rather than the rewards, rested upon him. With knit brow he turned from the stern.

As he walked forward his scalp prickled and a chill wind blew up his spine. He could feel upon the back of his head the glare of savage eyes. He whirled suddenly.

There was no one on deck behind, and there were still no red and green lights astern, to betoken the coming of another vessel.

Uncertainly he paused, his head turned toward the after deck. The threat of danger that he had felt so plainly in the gloom of the tropic night had been from directly behind. Imagination, undoubtedly, he assured himself.

He must not permit the terrors of his followers to infect him; he was the leader, and his spirit, rather, must animate them. He walked forward, but his head was half-turned still, his finger-nails cut his palms, and his feet moved warily, almost stealthily, along the planking.

TO BARBISSON, pacing the restless beat next morning, came Pearl, her brown eyes no longer soft, and with pupils pin-pointed by the glaring sun, and fiercely apprehensive.

She led him with rapid steps to the secluded space beside the rail between two lifeboats.

"Moodry's after us!" she whispered tensely. "He's found us. By radio!"

Barbisson's heart quickened its beat. He surveyed her keenly, and saw that this was something more than a guess. He kept his features rigid, unalarmed.

"How do you know?"

"I've been kidding the radio man, the blond one, anything to pass the time on this rotten boat. Today as I was coming around the corner of the wireless shack he was talking to somebody and I heard one word—'Barbisson.'!"

"You're sure?" he demanded. His hand reached out and grasped her

by the wrist. "Nobody knows—should know—that name on this ship."

"I heard it plain," she declared. "I ducked back fast, then, and skipped down to the other end of the deck. In a minute the mate came forward, too. It was he that had been talking to the operator. His eyes just flickered at me and then he looked at the ocean, steady as if his eyes had stuck tight in his head.

"I went on back to the shack. Blondie was there. Yesterday he was falling fast. Today he just looked at me, went all colors at once, jammed his earphones onto his head and pretended he was mighty busy."

"Well?" asked Barbisson in as calm a tone as he could muster, "do you consider that conclusive? What if Moodry has been radioing inquiries? His action and the mate's don't prove they connect us with the radio queries.

"Your blond conquest may merely have been warned against flirting with you, the wife of a passenger, by the mate. You're just Mrs. Smiley on board here. They may have wirelessed back that no man like Barbisson is on board. Don't you realize that?"

"I know!" the girl declared. Her eyes blazed resentfully at him. "Don't think you can make me believe anything else. You can't. I'm going to tell Jim about it now."

"Don't do that," Barbisson said swiftly. "He's half dotty with fear now; he'd certainly give the game away altogether."

The girl paused thoughtfully. "Well, somebody's got to get hold of those radio messages and see what's up," she said crisply. "That's in Jim's line."

"No!" Barbisson forbade. "He'd mess thing up. It's different on land, where you can make a getaway."

"What'll we do, then?" Pearl demanded.

"Nothing," he asserted. "Suppose by some devilish cleverness Moodry has found out that we are on board this ship? Can he kill us by radio? Or can he tip off the police?"

"He's not tipping off the police," the girl replied positively. "He's getting us himself. That's what he's doing. And how do we know he isn't on the mail boat to Cape Town? He could radio from there, couldn't he? The boat left England a week behind us, but it'll get in days before we do."

"Nonsense!" Barbisson exclaimed. "Now you're unreasonable."

"We ought to have taken the mail boat," she asserted acidly. "What good's this old tub to run away in? A fine brain you got—running away in the slowest boat out of Southampton."

The doubt in his own mind as to the wisdom of his course made her criticism rankle.

"I gave you your choice to quit if you didn't like the way I was managing things," he said savagely.

"I wish I'd taken it," the girl replied, her cheeks hot with anger. "Gawd! When I think how I believed that bilge about your not being afraid of Moodry—and you running away from him all the time you were telling me!"

"I'm not afraid of Moodry!" he declared emphatically. "I tell you, I'm not. He tapped the holster under his arm. "Let him come, if he wants to. I'll attend to him!"

The girl laughed derisively. "The same line, but we're still runnin'," she jeered. "Go tell Jim Taggart you aren't afraid of Moodry. He'll believe you. The poor nut is stick-

ing to us because he thinks you'll protect him from Moodry—you! What you'll do is lead us right to him. And then—well, heaven help the lot of us. Moodry's a bad one, but he's no boaster. He'll be on deck to do things, he will."

Barbisson walked away from her. The apprehension and unrest of his companions had reached a stage where it was plainly noticeable; already he had intercepted curious glances shot at them by other passengers.

And now this radio affair. The widening gap between them and England bridged and destroyed in the fraction of a second. Or was it the gap between them and that accursed mail boat?

His prestige as a leader was gone, utterly gone. He realized that. Taggart clung to him as he clung to his bottle. He still found some relief from dread in the false optimism of whisky and the last shreds of forlorn, unreasoning hope.

"I've got to do something," Barbisson told himself. In him rose again that harrowing sense of insecurity that he had thought was downed forever when he left crime and Moodry behind. "They'll be splitting on me, those two, giving me up to Moodry to save themselves, if they see half a chance to do it. I've got to get away from them—ditch them and save myself."

That night, sitting opposite the maundering Taggart in the smoking-room, he made his plans. The thought of what Taggart would feel if he knew what was going on in the other man's mind gave a certain zest to his meditations.

Only when he stepped at last into the blue-black night that lurked outside the illumined room did his rising enthusiasm receive a check. The hiss of the seas along the side, the slow, sullen movement of the ship, and the rising wind all seemed inimical, hostile to him.

And when he turned from the stern there leaped through him the electric thrill of danger. He could not rid himself of the thought, the feeling, even, of that cold, piercing eye of Moodry, focused upon him.

With an effort he forced himself to walk back to the taffrail. The inscrutable sea, the bright, unmoving stars, mocked him. A secret they had, a sinister secret, but they kept it well. Beyond their blankness, beyond the veil they held before him, skulked his merciless enemy. If he could see Moodry, if he knew where he was, it would not be so bad.

"Let him come," he muttered, laying a hand on his automatic. "What can he do to me? At the worst, kill me. Am I afraid of that? Let him come."

But the propeller throbbed on, and there was no answer, no sign from the blackness astern. He stood there frowning defiantly for a moment, and then turned to go back.

When he reached the door to the stairs he was drenched with perspiration, and his hand trembled on the door knob. In that short walk forward something, threatening he knew not what, had seemed again to leap upon him from astern. It was as if Moodry had projected ahead of him his hatred, his venom, in a form that was almost palpable. And it was stronger, this night, far stronger than it had been before.

"Maybe he's coming closer," Barbisson muttered, as he stood for a moment just inside, with his hand planted against the door. Slowly he recovered his composure. "I've got to get off this ship. They'll come, too, of course, but ashore I can give them the slip easily enough. They

can have their share of the stuff, but I won't have them with me, talking about Moodry—Moodry—Moodry—all the time. Taggart can take care of himself, and so can Pearl. The cowards—the shaking cowards!"

WITH three miles of shimmering, dark green water between her and the coast, the *Scapa* dropped her anchor. Beyond that stretch of water lay the coastal lowlands, completely hidden under a grayish pall of mist. Hidden, too, was the unimportant town that was the *Scapa's* first port of call. Two great headlands, identifying the place from seaward, thrust themselves forward over the shore lands from the range that paralleled the coast.

Pearl, on the boat deck, stared at the land with uneasy dislike.

"I suppose now you're leading us into some place full of fever and cannibals," she said peevishly.

"Stay aboard if you will," Barbisson replied indifferently.

"Oh, we're comin' with you," Jim Taggart answered for her. "This boat's given me the chills, an' Pearl, too, I reckon."

"That's right," said Pearl. "The boat or the company. I don't know which."

She glanced obliquely at Barbisson, but beyond tensing his lips he gave no sign that he had heard her. Of the three, he was most eager to get ashore—to get away from the other two and from the menace that he now felt pressing onward day and night.

Fever, hardship, danger of any other sort, seemed nothing to him, compared to that which was somewhere astern. He strained his eyes to observe the craft that was coming out to them from the mist-enshrouded shore—a steam-driven lighter and a small gasoline launch.

"They're going to take us in the motor boat," Barbisson said, as the two boats drew near. "We'd better be getting below."

Taggart glanced at the brief case that Barbisson held; then followed him closely as they descended to the cargo door that had been opened in the side of the ship.

They were the only passengers to land. Barbisson descended first into the dirty little boat, with its villainous-looking, swarthy captain and its grinning black engineer. After him Pearl scrambled down the Jacob's ladder, and then Taggart.

They sat in the stern, with their luggage piled on the floor boards at their feet. The black, in filthy dungarees, bent over the engine, and the fellow up forward spun the wheel.

The motor sputtered, and a flurry of foam churned behind the boat. It drew away from the side of the *Scapa* and pointed its nose toward the distant, veiled land.

"That's over!" said the girl. She stared back defiantly at the officers on the bridge, the radio man beside his shack. They were watching their late passengers intently, with covert suspicion.

Barbisson was looking ahead as hopefully as he had stared at the vast sea beyond the Needles. Here was a continent, a whole continent, to lose himself in. Moodry—not even Moodry—could find him here. A man—a man alone—could weave a twisted, unfathomable trail in such a place as this. He glanced impatiently at the laboring engine, then at the captain standing so placidly at his wheel. Would he never get off this damned ocean?

He turned to look behind, at the *Scapa*, and at the sea behind her. It was a blank, unbroken expanse of water, save for a black dot far to

the northward, where a sea bird winged. Yet that dread something still oppressed him, filling him with unconquerable unrest.

His roving eyes focused suddenly upon the sea bird. Strange, how rapidly it moved; it was growing bigger every instant.

"It's a flying boat!" Taggart exclaimed, almost in Barbisson's ear. The man leaped to his feet; stood, leg braced against the seat, staring at the thing Barbisson had seen.

"God! It's him!" Pearl screamed, and her fingers, jerking at the strings of blue beads about her neck, snapped the thread and sent them scattering over the floor boards.

It was a flying boat, and it swept toward the *Scapa* like a bird to its nest. Low over the water, it moved with unbelievable speed. The hum of its motor gradually rose above the clatter and bark of their own.

Barbisson awoke abruptly to life and action. He jerked his automatic out of its holster and leveled it at the astonished captain.

"Full speed!" he shouted harshly. "Go on! Go on! Speed!"

The pistol, wavering, included the open-mouthed engineer in its range. With a yell the black made frantic signs of submission and bent over his motor, adjusting it with clumsy fingers. The boat chugged on at an even speed.

The sea plane swept alongside the anchored steamer, then circled about it.

"It's him, all right, Barb," Taggart quavered. "There ain't nobody else would use a seaplane in this part of the world. He's gone back to one of his old games. It's him! What'll we do?"

He looked for counsel to Barbisson, but Barbisson's agitated gaze was upon the flying boat, and he heard nothing.

Taggart dropped to his knees beside his bag, opened it with shaking hands, and fumbled among the clothes within. Hastily he pulled out a pistol. His fingers gripped the butt as if it were a talisman against evil, but there was no strength in his muscles.

"He isn't landing alongside—Moodry isn't—he's comin' for a look at us first," Pearl said in a flat, unemotional voice. "He would do that, the cunning snake. Give him hell; he ain't got us yet."

"Faster!" shrieked Barbisson to the frightened captain. "Faster!"

Taggart, his right hand still clutching his pistol, drew a flask out of the bag and held it between his knees while he pulled the cork with his finger-nails. He drank, in spasmodic gulps, and then, coughing, dropped the bottle. His eyes keenly surveyed the flying boat. It was plain that the machine was heading toward them.

"I thought he had me buffaloed, but maybe I can take a crack at him," he muttered. There was no confidence in his voice.

"Fill him full of lead when he gets close enough," Pearl whispered as her hand touched Barbisson's arm.

The seaplane was roaring along close to the surface. It devoured the distance between steamship and motor boat, moving toward them at a speed which was dreadful and unnatural. Within a few hundred feet it lay suddenly over on its side and banked around, as it had swirled around the *Scapa*.

Barbisson, his face working, one shaking hand on the coaming, leaned far over the side of the boat to squint at the solitary figure in the circling plane. Turned toward him, he glimpsed a helmeted head, thin-lipped, unsmiling.

"Moodry!" he shrieked. "Moodry! Kill him!"

Throwing up his automatic, he pulled the trigger again and again. As fast as his finger could move he sent bullets at the machine sweeping by more than a hundred yards away.

"Stop! You blasted fool!" roared Taggart. His hand smote Barbisson on the face. "Let him come close."

But Barbisson had emptied his pistol and now, face alive with panic, was still pressing at the unresponsive trigger.

"Moodry!" he shrieked again. "Kill him! Kill him!"

The seaplane, darting astern, turned sharply and headed directly for the boat. The thunder of the motor was deafening in their ears. The hull beneath the knife-like wings seemed almost on top of them and they could plainly see the malign face of the man they dreaded.

With a yelp of anguish the black engineer leaped over the side and the captain, after a half-hearted wrench at the wheel, followed him.

The broad hull hurtled by, inches over them. The next instant the roar of the motor was silenced, and the seaplane settled in the water with a swirl and gush of spray.

AGAIN the powerful motor bellowed into action. The blunt nose of the flying boat turned toward them, the hull ploughed over the water.

Moodry was standing up by the wheel now, and the machine was moving steadily, at little more than their own speed, toward them. The man's countenance was cool, impressive, but his eyes never left the face of Barbisson. Leisurely he put one hand in the pocket of his leather coat and drew from it an automatic, kin to the weapons in the hands of Barbisson and Taggart.

"Kill him!" Barbisson screamed again. He was reloading. His thin fingers clicked the clip of cartridges again and again against the butt of the pistol before he managed to push it home.

The cry of the other man infected Taggart with something of his unthinking frenzy. He leveled his gun at the motionless figure in the boat and cut loose. Bullets blared out of the hot barrel, and the recoiling gun seemed to dance in Taggart's hand.

Suddenly he uttered a queer, bubbling groan, and his knees buckled under him. He slumped down into the bottom of the boat. He lay there, one arm across his leg.

Moodry had fired only once. Though his shot had cut through Taggart's windpipe, it seemed to Barbisson that the man's eyes had not wavered in their horrible fixation on his own. Moodry had killed Taggart by a casual movement of his wrist. And Taggart's lead had not touched Moodry; he stood as before, cool, impressive.

With a little whimper Pearl knelt down beside the body of Taggart. Her hands flickered fearfully about him, touching his sleeve, his big chest, the buttons on his coat.

The flying boat came on, bringing the man beside the wheel steadily into better range for Barbisson's automatic.

Above the cowering girl, Barbisson let his pistol drop from his hand. It fell beside her.

Giving voice to a wail of stark terror, he dived blindly over the side of the boat. It was as if the man would hide himself, even at the price of death, from that basilisk stare.

His body had not yet buried itself in the sea when the automatic Moodry held whipped up and belched thrice. The agitated white water of the splash went pink, and then red. Through its growing carmine

opacity came no movement. The surface became placid once more as the motor boat, engine still thudding faithfully, left the spot astern.

Pearl, peering over the gunwale, moved her dilated eyes from the crimson cloud in the water to the man in the seaplane. He was turning the craft around to come up astern of the ungoided launch. To his thin lips a smile, hideously restrained, came creeping.

Moodry dropped his pistol back into his coat pocket and with a hand on the throttle gauged the relative speed of the two craft. The gap between was closing rapidly.

His eyes, no longer basilisk, sought hers, and the meagre smile widened. Shuddering, the girl raised her hand, in an instinctive gesture of repulsion. She realized by the weight that her fingers held something—it was the pistol that Barbisson had dropped. She moved it toward him, and her fingers tightened.

The automatic leaped in her hand; wrested itself from her grasp. An explosion crashed in her ears.

Dazedly Pearl looked around. Had Moodry shot her—killed her?

She looked at him. The smile upon his tenuous lips had become a silly smirk. His mouth opened like that of a fish. Abruptly he collapsed against the wheel. His eyes still surveyed her; then the seaplane veered a trifle, and the eyes indifferently passed from her face.

"He's dead—that's all that's wrong with him," Pearl said in her flat voice. "Dead! Ain't that funny? Moodry dead!"

She glanced down at the blue-black pistol at her feet. "A little thing like that—an' he's dead as a doornail!"

Suddenly she laughed, a queer little gurgle, catching in her throat. She slipped down into the bottom of the boat and rocked herself backward and forward, laughing uncontrollably, while over the placid green waters launch and seaplane plodded ahead on converging paths.

The Boy Who Rode Amberene

By CHARLES BURNAP

I AIN'T the least bit superstitious, never was in my life, but one time I seen a mighty queer thing. It was forty years back, but it makes me shiver to think of it, even tonight!

It was jist sich weather as this, warm for September, and bright moonlight nights. But in them days the farmers didn't have Fords and there wan't no black, oily highway in front of the yard. Only a fine gravel road.

I was livin' right here, a widder, same as now, and my brother, George, that's settled in Asheville, was a young man at the time and had our old homestead some five miles to your right.

He was studyin' law and, together with raisin' fine cattle and makin' a horse trade now and then, had done pretty well. He had picked up a boy for to help him, by the name of Kevin O'Connor.

Kevin's folks was no account people livin' down t'other end o' the country. His mother was dead and his father given to drink, at least that was the story, and the youngster had run off from home and worked around doin' chores till George got a-hold of him.

I niver quite liked the boy. He was kinda audacious and sassy, good lookin' enough in his way, though lackin' in manners, and most folks considered him lazy for work on a farm.

But he sure could ride horseback! George often told me he niver seen his equal, outside of a circus—and him not over thirteen!

Well, after he'd been there a week, George bought him some clothes; the child was in rags. And 'stead of havin' him sleep in the barn, took him into the house and made a lot of him.

George, when he once took up with

a person couldn't see none of their faults, and I'll say this further for Kevin, he appeared to be grateful. I never seen a human bein' care so much for another as that boy did for my brother. He would work his hands off for George, though when it came to doin' the least little thing for anyone else, he simply wan't there.

I guess he know'd I had no particular use for him, for he never come here very much. And when I'd meet him once in a while and give him a scoldin' for his careless no account ways, 'steada actin' ashamed of himself, he'd give me that strange smile o' his'n, kinda darin' and impudent and yet some way so good-natured it would make me feel cheap. In fact, when Kevin would smile I could never jist understand him—not even the last time I seen it.

WELL, George had bought a kind o' light, bay-colored mare, her hair so faded it almost was yeller, and the scariest critter I ever laid eyes on and sorta vicious at that.

Why, even George's hired man, who was used to all sorts o' horses, was somewhat afeared of her, claimin' she wan't fit for no one to handle, even under the saddle.

Then fust thing we knew, Kevin was ridin' her and 'fore the summer was over, it seemed like she thought as much of that youngster as did he o' George. He gave her the name "Amberene," I s'pose on account of her color.

He not only rode her, but trained her for jumpin', and pretty soon had her so she could go over any fence on the farm, with him on her back.

'Bout that time, my husband's estate was through probate and I had money in bank and a good notion to buy the next forty acres, down the road beyond them big elms. But some folks thought the title wan't straight.

So far as we knew, it was owned by old Squire Perkins, but they didn't consider him overly honest and said he hadn't kept up the taxes like he should.

So rather than pay a reg'lar lawyer, I had the papers sent over to George and I told him to be mighty keerful, for twelve hundred dollars meant a hull lot to me.

In due course o' time, Kevin O'Connor rides over with a note from my brother sayin' the title was good. So I sent him back by way o' the Squire's, to tell him to come over Saturday evenin' and bring 'long his deed and I'd have the money all ready.

It never entered my head for to doubt that George had got the thing straight, and when Saturday come I went to the bank and drew out my money, returnin' by noon, so that William, a farm hand we had at the time, could have the team in the evenin' to go into town.

And I told William to stop, on the way comin' back, at Johnathan's place for to git me some pumpkins. Johnathan lived at the corner where you turned off from George's, 'bout three miles from here.

When supper was over an' William had started, I helped the hired gal clean up the table and set her to doin' the dishes, while I come out here on the porch to wait for the Squire, feelin' peaceful and calm in my mind, with the moon comin' up above yonder hill—like it's doin' tonight.

Meanwhile, things over at George's hadn't been goin' so good; though, of course, I didn't know it till later. It seems after he'd sent me that letter sayin' Perkins' title was good, he got to thinkin' it over and didn't feel sure he was right.

George wan't far ahead in the law and hadn't much time for his studies. Anyhow, he made up his mind to go over the papers agin, but somethin' delayed him and 'twas pretty nigh dusk o' that Saturday evenin' when I'd sent fer the Squire to come, that he got at the abstract, and sure enough in an hour he found out where he was wrong.

There was some kinda tax sale he had clean overlooked, and the deed o' that rascally Perkins wouldn't be worth the paper 'twas writ on, to say nothin' of my twelve hundred dollars!

Well, George was in a terrible fix. He thought a hull lot of his sister, if I do say it myself. So he hitched up a rig to drive over, and was ready to start when he seen it was nigh half after seven and a long five miles to drive.

Kevin was with him, of course, and George asks what time I'd sent word for the Squire to come and the boy says: "At seven."

So George knows he never could make it and Kevin says, "You write her a note while I brings out Amberene. She will git thar if anything livin' can do it, and maybe I might be in time."

They didn't have telephones then, least not in our part o' the country, no more'n they had autos, nor highways with electric lights at the crossin's. 'Twas jist a long country road with the moon shinin' over the trees.

George felt pretty nervous about it. The mare was so skittish and not used to travelin' at night, but knowin' how Kevin could ride, he tells him to put on the saddle while he writes the note.

When he comes back from the kitchen, Kevin had Amberene out and was hangin' onto the bridle with all he could do to keep his bare feet out of the way of her hoofs.

"Now, do the best that is in you," George told him. "Ride fer your life, and don't mind if my sister jaws you about me. Don't give her no sass, for the hull fault is mine."

"I'll take her some flowers," says Kevin, "that'll make her good-natured," and he gits a bunch o' white tiger-lilies that grew on a bush by the barn.

They was queer kind o' flowers, the only white tiger-lilies I ever seen anywhere. The bush had been thar since George and I was children at home; they was late bloomin' too, and hung on till frost come.

So he picked off a bunch and stuck 'em into the front of his shirt. He never wore a coat as I can remember, savin' maybe in the winter.

At that George had to laugh, though it made him kind o' impatient, and next thing the boy grabs the mare by the mane and George takes his foot and tosses him into the saddle.

"Now, be off with you, Kevin," he says, "and look pretty sharp, for I wouldn't want to see you git hurt, though I'd feel disgraced for the rest o' my life, if I'm the means of her losin' the money."

At that the boy reaches down from the saddle and gives him a pat on the shoulder, kinda caressin'.

"If it's all that important, you needn't to worry. Death nor the divil shan't stop me," says Kevin, and then was off.

NOW that brings me back to the time I was tellin', when I sat out here on the porch a-waitin' the Squire. Things 'bout the old place was much the same as tonight, 'ceptin' 'stead o' that fence, we had a hedge in front o' the house, and pretty soon, t'other side of it, along come Squire Perkins.

By that time the moon was well up and things clear as a bell, and

seein' me he turns in at the gate and he says, "Good evenin', Mrs. Morton." I says, "The same to you, Squire Perkins." And he says, "I've got the deed ready, with the notary's seal."

With that we went into the parlor and I lit the lamp and showed him a chair, and we talked for it may have been half an hour.

Then I went to the sideboard to git out my money, and returnin' looked at my watch and seen 'twas jist ten after eight. And I thought, it bein' kinda late, I better pull down the shades 'fore countin' them bills, an' I hardly had done so when I heard the faint sound of a gallopin' horse, 'way off down the road.

I listened a moment and the sound come nearer and louder—'tang-tang-tang'—on the hard, gravel road, in a kinda one-two-three measure, like their hoofs do when they're runnin'.

So I steps to the porch and hardly was out when it come past the hedge, an' the rider seemed to draw rein at the gate so quick that the animal reared up on its haunches, and then I seen that the one who was on it was Kevin.

"What on airth is the matter?" I called, but he didn't say nothin' and soon as I come to the hedge he points to them elms that I showed you this evenin', where the forty acres begins. They was small, little trees at the time.

Well, he points down that way, shakin' his head, and don't give me a word in reply. At which, thinkin' him up to some of his tricks, I got sorta mad and:

"Kevin O'Connor," I says, "quit your foolin' and say what's the matter, 'stead o' actin' like you'd lost the little sense that you got!"

By that time I was out in the road, keepin' quite a ways back from the mare for fear of her heels, and Kevin points again to the elms and I steps round t'other side to see what he was tryin' to show me, and then an odd thing took place.

Without his sayin' a word, *I knowed what he meant!*

It came like a shot through my brain—George had found somethin' wrong with the title and I wan't to buy that land o' the Squire!

At that I turned back to Kevin. His horse had moved out from the shade of a tree by the gate and wan't ten feet away, her yeller hair shinin' straight in my face!

He musta seen that I knowed what he wanted to tell me, for all of a sudden he flashed me one of them strange smiles o' his'n. Only now it was different from ever I seen it, kinda triumphant and dazzlin', and someway on-airthly!

Then he holds up a big bunch o' flowers and tosses 'em at me and when I reached out to catch 'em it seemed they come right into my hands as I shut 'em together, but 'stead I hadn't caught nothin', nor yet seen 'em fall!

Of course, I glanced down and, findin' no flowers on the ground at my feet, looked up agin, all in a second—*and Kevin was gone!*

The horse had no rider at all; jist the saddle and bridle with the reins hangin' loose on her neck.

I never could tell you the shock that it gim'me. Even now I don't like to think of it—forty years after.

I don't know how long I stood thar. I s'pose I must 'a' looked like a fool starin' at that empty saddle with the eyes startin' out of my head.

The mare seemed as much astonished as me and was shiverin' like she was scared nigh to death.

Then common sense come to my aid, at least I tried to make myself think it was sense, and I says to myself, "It's some trick o' Kevin's. He must'a slipped off and hid by the hedge." Though it simply did

not seem possible, for my eyes wan't off him a jiffy and him considerably nearer to me than he was to the hedge.

I called him two or three times, and gettin' no answer I tied Amberene to a post; her kinda whinnyin' like she didn't want me to leave her and the cold sweat comin' out on her neck, warm as the air was.

Jist then Squire Perkins comes to the door. For the moment I'd clean forgot he was thar, and I hurries back to the house and I says: "Squire, we can't close this trade up tonight, after all."

He inquires: "Why not, can't we do it?" surprised as you please.

I sez: "George has found somethin' wrong with the papers. He's sent over word by Kevin O'Connor!"

And the words weren't more'n out o' my mouth when I thought, "what an awful black lie," for Kevin hadn't much as opened his lips nor said a word about George, nor anyone else, aye, yea or nay.

Then we argues the matter back and forth for a while, him claimin' his title was good and me sayin' I'd sooner trust my brother's opinion, and at last he gits pretty cross and goes in for his hat and starts home.

SOON as he's gone I lead Amberene round to the barnyard, thinkin' if Kevin had played me a trick after all the scare that he gim'me, and maybe that very moment was sneakin' round through the orchard eatin' my apples, I'd wring his neck when I caught him.

I hadn't more'n got back when William drives up and comes rushin' in awful excited an' he says: "Mrs. Morton, somethin' awful has happened. Kevin O'Connor's got killed!"

Will was fearful excited and when I could make head or tail out of his talkin', I found that what had took place was somethin' like this.

Old Mr. Johnathan was gettin' through with his chores when he seen Kevin comin' from George's, his horse on a gallop. And 'stead o' goin' round by the road—as I said, Johnathan lived at the corner—the boy leaps his horse over the gate o' the lane that cuts through back o' the barn, intendin', as it seemed, to jump the next gate at this end, and so git out to the main road again, thereby savin' time.

Johnathan had hauled up a load o' stone in the mornin' and, needin' his wagon, had dumped it outside the second gate, which wan't often used.

So he hollers to Kevin—jist a second too late!

The horse takes the gate with a bound, and comin' down on the stones falls flat on her side, throwin' the youngster clean over her head.

She was up in a breath, 'fore the old man could git thar, and he seen her stand still for a second and then whirl half way round, like Kevin was mountin', and make off down this way.

Johnathan's eyesight wan't over good and he couldn't tell what had took place, so he runs to the gate, and 'stead o' bein' up an' away, Kevin was lyin' right where he fell, with a great gash on his temple and the blood pourin' out!

"Seemed like he never moved after he lit!" Will explained. "He was dead when the old man picked him up, for he felt of his heart."

"What time did it happen?" I asked, feelin' as if my own heart had stopped, too.

"Eight o'clock, Johnathan said the clock in their kitchen was strikin' when he heard the horse come down the lane."

Though, by that time, I was all in a tremble, I sent William to put up Amberene, tellin' him she was tied by the barn, and I goes out to the wagon he'd left at the gate and

drives all alone over to Johnathan's.

Fust thing I did when I got thar was to see how their clock run with my watch, and they was right on the dot, so then I knowed I'd seen Kevin here at my gate all of ten minutes after he died!

George had been sent for and come pretty soon, and I never seen a man feel worse than my brother. He wouldn't o' keered more for the boy if he had been his own flesh and blood.

He and I stayed overnight to set up with the corpse, and after Johnathan's folks was a-bed he tole me why he had sent the boy over, and 'bout the letter he'd writ. To which, for the time, I said nothin' at all, but took him into the parlor whar poor Kevin was.

'Twas the fust time I'd been willin' to enter the room, and we stood for a minute, kinda on tip-toe, lookin' around. It hadn't been much they could do until daylight; only laid him out on an old-fashioned settle that stood by the window.

He was bare-footed still, havin' on the same clothes that he wore. A sheet was spread over him, and foldin' it back I seen they had washed the blood from his forehead, and thar on his poor silent breast someone had laid a bunch o' white tiger-lilies.

"He did what he could," said my brother, tears fillin' his eyes, "and now to make a bad matter worse, I s'pose you have lost all your money, but don't blame poor Kevin. He was faithful to death!"

"Yes," I replied, speakin' solemn and soft, "till death and *beyond it!*"

Then I tole how that darin' young spirit had sped on its way, scornin' the shroud and the tomb, and had brought me the message and thrown me that phantom boquet, and lastly, I told of the smile that he gim'me—dazzlin', triumphant!

The Black Ribbon

Lady Beresford one morning came down to breakfast looking pale and wan, and wearing a black ribbon on her wrist. She declined to tell her husband what was wrong, but asked if the post had arrived as she knew she would hear of the death of a childhood friend, the Earl of Tyrone, who had died such a day at such an hour. Her husband ridiculed the idea, but said nothing more when the news did come in absolute confirmation of what his wife had said. Lady Beresford continued to wear the ribbon, and not a soul was allowed to see what it concealed. On her deathbed, however, the wearer of this black badge confided the story to a friend. She had been brought up with the Earl of Tyrone, with whom she had made a compact, that whichever of them died first should, if possible, return and assure the other of a future life. She had wakened from sleep to find Tyrone by her bedside, and screamed. He had told her not to be afraid, that he had departed this life, and had returned to fulfil his promise. She asked him how she could be sure that she was not dreaming, and he wrote his name in her pocketbook. She asked for another proof, so he laid his finger on her wrist, which was immediately impressed with a shrunken black mark. This mark, which she had concealed beneath the ribbon, she displayed to her friend, and added that Tyrone had foretold, among other matters, the hour and day of her death, which occurred as she had stated.

Nothing Ever Happens to Angel!

by EVADNE PRICE

Gertie, the Gold-Digger

The third of a series of short stories, each complete in itself.

THE point is, did I ask for Ponto to bring me the letter? Did I? No. If Gaby must go out and buy dogs and because it ate her tin of reducing cream she must give the hound to me, and I treat him well and he gets to love me and brings me everything it can lay it's teeth into, am I to blame?

It's Fate, and you can't do Fate in the eye and I'm not going to worry no more. It's marvellous the way Fate gets me. Just when I'm going along peaceful and resined, along comes Fate and lands me in some trouble without so much as a by-your-leave.

Did I tell Ponto to go across to Mr. Antony when we was at breakfast in the private suit, and shove his nose into said gentleman's dressing-gown pocket and bring me the letter I'd noticed Mr. Antony had hid hurried with a nervous look in the direction of his trusting wife's bedroom, what was late as usual for breakfast and not present with us?

No. Ponto went and done it off his own bat, and when I read the letter, it having got mixed somehow with my own, and the smell of which nearly knocked me down, so to speak, with it's violents, well, you could of floored me by raising your little finger, I give you my word.

I would never of believed it of Mr. Antony, but you can't never tell with men; never. And Gaby sleeping in the next room as innocent as a newborn babe, if you can call a newborn babe innocent that has its hair in curlers and a rubber band round its double chin, which no boudoir cap can disguise, and I wonder how Mr. Antony stands for same.

Not that I ever read others letters, even by accident, I only glanced at this to see if my eyes wasn't playing me up.

"Darling Tonykins"—was how it began. "Your little Gertykins is in Nice and wants to see you. I lamped you yesterday with two overblown

females. Which was wifey, Tonykins? Whichever it was, my sympathy's yours.

"I followed you to your hotel, and this is to tell you that I've still got two of your love letters and wear them next my heart. Isn't your Gertykins faithful? If I don't see you to-day I'll call."

Well, as I says before, would you of believed same?

My womanly indignation re Gertykins summery of my personal attracktions was swomped in curiousity re Mr. Antony's sex attracktion. It beat me holler, but I suppose any man possesses same if he is a millionaire. I fixes Mr. Antony with a stern eye and sniffs virtuous.

"Ponto," I says severe, "you're a bad dog to bring me that scented epistle from Mr. Antony's pockets," and I gives the hound a large bit of bacon to punish him.

Mr. Antony turns pale and feels hasty in his pocket. I watches him cool and calm not unmixed with sorrow, mark you, me having a soft spot and ever will for my pal's hubby what has rescued me from grinding poverty pro tem.

"Angel," gulps he, "that letter—give it back. It's an important business communication re stocks and shares from my broker."

"Mr. Antony," I says severe, "I may be comparrotively young and innocent of the world and wicked ways of same, but I've yet to see a letter re stocks and shares writ on violet paper and smelling like Woolworth's perfume dept. on a hot day. Unfortunate I've read and noted contents of same by accident and Ponto."

"My God," says he, dropping head in hands. "Don't you betray me, Angel. If Gaby finds out, I'm done. What would she say?"

"It would be easier to ask what she wouldn't say," says I lofty. "In the meantime I herewith return the body," so saying, I passes the letter back.

There is a painful silence while I waits for his news, which he breaks by leaning across to me. "Angel," he whispers mysterious, "I'm in trouble, something terrible, and I must tell someone. Can I trust you?"

"Spill it," encourages I. "You can trust me with your life's blood, Mr. Antony."

"I know I can, Angel," says he. "Well, it's Gertie, the lady what has writ the letter you have just read by accident and Ponto. I met her in London three years ago, and I—er—we"—he hesitates.

"Carry on to paragraff two," I prompts tactful, "I can fill in the dotted lines having an outside imagination."

"It was before I met Gaby again," he pleads. "Then I knew what true love was and I tries to shoot Gertie off, and I pay her a thousand quid for my letters, but you see she's kept two——"

"But Gaby 'll understand if it's *before* marriage," I tells him. "She's no convent produce, is Gaby; she knows that most men are as pure as the driven snow, only driven a hell of a long way."

"I know, Angel," says Mr. Antony gloomy, "but some of them letters was *after* marriage me being frightened to shoot Gertie till some months after I was wed, and knowing Gertie I bet the two she's saved are dated *after* the ceremony."

I gaze at him admiring. "Gee, but you're the elefant's tail feathers, Mr. Antony," I remarks awed. "To think of you having the nerve to slip that men-were-deceevers-ever stuff acrost two wide-awake dames simultaneous, Gertie *and* Gaby. Well, the former may be hard to lose, but if the latter finds you've been inscrib-

ing sheik letters to another, you'll be able to sell your shares of the world's joy for a baggertell of wealth for the rest of your natural life."

He puts his elbow absent-minded in the eggs and bacon at this statement of fact and emitts a holler groan. "True, true, Angel, I know. Gaby, although a sweet, good woman, is when roused——"

Words fail him and believe me, he has my sympathy to the last lap.

"Who is this Gertie?" I asks chatty, always ready to hear a life story.

"A chorus lady," Mr. Antony confides, with a furtif glance in the direction of Gaby. "Gertie Gerald, her full name is. Know her?"

"I can't place the name," I rejoins, jazzing up the old think-box a spot. "But if she's chorus, she'll have half a dozen nom de theatres. The leopard may not be able to change it's spots, that being, so to speak, an expensive hobby, but changing names costs a chorus lady nix on the dollar."

"Gertie's cost me something on and off," he continues in funeral tones, "and now she'll bleed me over these letters, you'll see.

"How I'm to get away and meet her with Gaby watching me night and day I don't know. But if I don't, she'll come here and blackmail me—and Gaby!" He shudders perseptible.

"Angel, could you, would you, do it for me?"

"Do which'?' I says cautious.

"You can get out easier than me," says Mr. Antony eager. "You write and fix an appointment somewhere with Gertie, offer her a hundred quid for them letters. I'll cash a check and give you the money this morning and you can shut Gertie's mouth for me.

"Do this for me, Angel, and it means fifty quid cash down in your own pocket. Here's the letter back for Gertie's address. Quick, I hear Gaby coming, not a word."

"Well, I ask you as Christian friends, what could a poor girl do, me not having a bean in the wide world barring a gold mesh bag, studded with *dud* emeralds, as I'd proved when trying to sell same a week ago, and may the false donor have it put acrost him soon and proper, the tripehound. Was it in human nature to refuse to earn fifty quid honest and do a dear friend a good turn at the same time?

I lost my breath for a moment, retaining presents of mind to shove Gertie's letter into my bag as Gaby enters, looking like spring-is-here-and-with-it-the-robin in a pale green neglige.

"Good-morning, Gaby," I says affable.

"Morning," she retorts cold, not yet having recovered from a certain episode of mine re a long-lost lover, and I looks meaning like and significant at Mr. Antony and nods affirmingly.

He winks back, the silly cookoo, for as luck would have it Gaby catches him winking at me and from that second, as she remarked later, her bitter suspicions was born and me and Mr. Antony was having, in the language of the country, a *leay-song*.

WELL, I've had a bit of trouble in my life procuring money, but never anything like the trouble I had to make a chance for Mr. Antony to slip me that hundred and fifty quid. Talk about lurkery! No wonder Gaby's suspicions grew into certaintys as the hours flew that morn.

I knew she had her gimlets on us, but he never suspected, being a trusting male, and twice when I tried to convey said news to him by signs,

she caught me and I could see that tore it worse.

Finally I lured her to a jeweler's window and got her interested in a diamond bracelet, her only having a paltry seven of same already, and I drop my hanky, and Mr. Antony picks it up and slips the bundle of notes into same and the dark deed is done, and I breathes again.

Well, we got back to the Negresco Hotel and I locks myself into my portion of the Bridal Suit, and trembling, I undone the packet of Fishers. It was a beautiful view. You can talk about your Alps and your Pirranes and such, but the finest view I'd ever seen up to date was that packet of crisp, clean banknotes. Fifty for me, and a hundred for Gertie!

Then all at once the injustice of life come all over me like a rash. A hundred for Gertie, a common gold-digger, and a measly half of her amount for me, a decent hard-working woman. It wasn't fair, and it ought not to be allowed. And I decided then and there it wouldn't be allowed. Only over my cold, grey corpse would Gertie get that hundred.

A hundred for *me* and fifty for *Gertie*, that song had a more catchy refrain, thank you. Mr. Antony would never know who had what portion of the doings, he was willing to pay a hundred and fifty for them two letters, and I figured if I was clever enough to do Gertie in the eye over the deal, he'd be the last to say "I shouldn't if I was you, Angel."

Then I thinks it over and decides that fifty is far too much for Gertie, twenty is plenty, which shows the demoralizing effect of wealth on the system, and how the love of money gets you down and worries you like a dog, which W. Shakespear says is the root of all evil and believe me that gent knew what he was enunciating.

Only for that I'd not be packing at this moment, ready to bunk off, a fugitif without a friend bar Ponto, and the girl I've loved all my life turned against me, and thinking me the Queen of dirty tykes.

So, the Fishers spread out in rows, I sits and ponders solid how to get my claws into entire same. Anyhow, I decide to start a bank account with a hundred of the doings in case I lose them, and keep fifty to see if I can appeal to Gertie's better nature—if any, which I doubt.

So I sneak out of the Bridal Suit and hop it to the bank and puts in the hundred as arranged, gives them a specimen signatur and gets my check book and a paying-in book.

But I'm uneasy in my mind about giving Gertie as much as twenty for two paltry letters. I seems a shocking waste of good wealth.

And on the way back to the bank I have a Happy Thought for the Day. Why shouldn't said gold-digger give me them letters for nix, and me hang on to the whole hundred and fifty? It don't make no odds to Mr. Antony, so long as he lays his claws into the chunks of evidents, meaning his letters to Gertie.

Besides, I argue, I bet he'd rather the money was in the family, if he knew, which with Heaven's assistants and a spot of luck, he never would. Besides, I never had no use for blackmailers, it being dead against my principals. I'm all for a dash of gold-digging if the victim's easy, but not blackmailery, it's low and unworthy of a true lady, and it's against the law and dangerous, anyhow.

I therefore determine to double-cross Gertie, and land the letters free of charge, although I might, if pressed and to save trouble, hand out a tenner relucktant. And I

flatter myself I'm a match for fifty lady gold-diggers if it comes to a word battle, having hobnobbed with same for more years than I care to remember.

And then I got a brain wave as quick as you can say knife. I was passing a little hotel when it come to me, and I went in instantaneous and books a room in the name of Mrs. Antony. Then I writes a note to Gertie and dispatches same by special messenger, signing it Mr. Antony. You get the idea? I was going to pretend to be Gaby so that there would be no sense for Gertie to try and blackmail a man what had a miraculous wife what didn't care about his past; the whole point being she was working on his fear of said wife knowing about his relations with her, which I had no doubt was pretty hecktic and so.

She had said in her letter that she didn't know which of the two ladies was Mrs. Antony, and when she arrived and saw me she'd swallow my identity without the need of a disk to prove same.

Yes, it was as easy as drinking a bottle of Ginness. Gertie would hand out the two letters for nix and look like a sick cat in so doing, and it would quell any future acktivites in case she had a couple more exhibits hidden in her stocking for future use when the bank balance was getting low.

WELL, being tired, I lies down and rests in my bedroom for a couple of hours and then up comes the manager and says a lady to see me and in walks Gertie as large as life and twice as saucy.

The minute I seen her I knew that whatever I thought of her relations with Mr. Antony I could double my suspicions and not wrong her. She was a vamp if ever I seen a vamp, with dead black hair, dead white face, dead black eyes and tortose shell ear-rings.

That hair, thinks I immediate, is too good to be true. It's dyed or I'll eat this bed-cover, which I'd hate to do, it being not too afflicted with cleanliness or godliness.

"Oh," says Mrs. Vamp, took aback, "I understood Mr. Antony was here."

"Well, you understood wrong," purrs I sweet, "it's his wife, Mrs. Antony, and he's put the matter in my lily white hands," and I holds up the violet letter which smells harder than ever. "I wish to tell you, miss, that what's past is past, and I'll have them two letters prompt."

"Oh, will you?" she says nasty, and I yawns languid.

"I will," I says affable, "and P.D.Q. And you'll excuse me saying that I don't think it's nice of you to blackmail a man what was evidently having temporary insanity when he writ same."

"What do you mean?" she asks hot.

"Well, would a man write such bilge if he was right in the bean? To *you*, I means?" I looks her up and down insulting, not having forget her remarks in the violet letter re my personal attracktions.

"Is that so?" asks the gold-digger. "Well, I think your right about him being insanitary, otherwise you'd never have tricked him into ornamenting you with the gold band, Mrs. Peroxide."

Well, there are a few things that get my red rag out and one is to have my lilywhite fairness alluded to in terms of scornery. I stood and faced Gertie and retorts ladylike: "It wouldn't do you no harm to have your face invisibly mended, miss, especially a few stitches in that slit you talk out of."

Well, that floored her prow temm, and I took another close-up of her while she got her breath. Her face

seemed familiar, and I looked again. Then the great white light broke. For the love of Pete, I thinks sudden and estatic, I got you, Gertie. Gertie Golding, that's what you are, the girl what tried to blackmail the manager of the "Mr. Fish Of Grimsby" Revue when I was in the co., and you nearly got pinched *that* time, only he wasn't anxious to get too near the police himself for personal reasons, or you would of.

Gertie Golding, well, of all the luck! It's my lucky day all right, all right. I got Gertie cold, I got her where I want her. Mrs. Peroxide, indeed.

"You overblown hag," she gasps in reply to my late repartee.

"Calm yourself, Gertie," I says with a superior laugh. "Has it not dawned on you yet that as a blackmailer you're the world's washout?"

"What you mean?" she demands furious.

"As a blackmailer, Gertie," I says, "a baby in arms could give you points. You're a dead frost. Try washing doorsteps, Gertie. Although hard work, it would pay you better, Miss GERTIE GOLDING."

She starts violent. "What—what you mean?" she blusters, but I see all the pep has wilted. "My name's Miss Gerald."

"Mr. Fish of Grimsby" to you, Gertie," I retorts. "I was engaged to be married to the gent you tried to blackmail. Your head was red in them far away dead days, not that you was any better looking in that colour. I should try jade green next time, or wear it it's natural color, grey.

"You tried to blackmail my fiance, the same old gag, his wife mustn't see his letters, but me only being his fiance he told me, being scared to death of his real wife, and he hid me in a cupboard with a crack in it as a witness during your interview. Frightened you good and proper, eh Gertie, when he offered to send for the police? Which *I* will do instant, if you don't hand over Mr. Antony's letter. *I* don't mind making it public, and this violet letter proves blackmail."

I shakes it in her face and she wilts perceptable at the magic word police and fumbles in her bag, exposing to my view a large wad of hundred frank notes, and an idea assails me.

"And as punishment," I continues stern, "I shall require you to give me five hundred franks for charity."

Gertie tells me where I can go, but I am addament.

"Police if you don't," I says smiling, and the bunkered vamp hands out the notes amidst vile recrimenations, plus Mr. Antony's two letters.

"And now," I says severe, "you can go and I hope this will be a lesson to you and that you'll turn holy and good in future."

But as she exits out of my life using language I'd scorn to repeat, in public anyway, I feel my advise won't be took.

WELL, I paid the hotel, got my receipted bill, and went and banked the other fifty, keeping the filthy lucre I'd extracted from the low golddigger for current exes, and tootled back to the Bridal Suit feeling like Brewster's millions.

Yes, I can tell you I fairly oozed joy from every paw. It's a good thing I didn't think of Fate. When you've got a nice fat bank balance you don't think of Fate and that's the trouble.

There was I with a paying-in book registering a hundred and fifty Fishers, I'd paid back an old score with Gertie, stopped my dear girlhood friend, Gaby, from having her young ideals wrecked, and saved her hubby from a low harpie.

I tell you, I could of danced as I slipped the two letters into the (imitation) emerald-studded gold mesh bag, but refrained in case Gaby overheard. We was dining downstairs and relations being somewhat strained, as I remarked earlier, between my bosom pal Gaby and me, I had ceased the habit of going in to her room for a small before-grub chat, so I takes the lift straight down after dressing, hoping to catch Mr. Antony in the lounge and pass him exhibits 1 and 2, before Gaby blows in.

I had been down fully ten minutes, however, before he rushes across.

"Angel," he whispers in a hurry. "Somethings wrong, be on your guard, and for the love of Mike, don't betray me. Promise."

"I promise, and here's the letters." I gives them to him just in time for him to slip them into his pocket before Gaby sails out of the lift and approaches majestic.

I knew something was wrong the minute I lamped her dial, and I gasps. For she opens her bag and produces my paying-in book, what I'd put in my drawer in my desk.

"What you call yourself?" she pants, oblivious of the passers-by with their ears flapping.

"Two entrances to-day, one for a hundred and one for fifty. I knew the minute I seen Hank wink at you this morning that you was luring him, you Deliler. And my hubby cashes a check for a hundred and fifty this morning. Here's his check book. You what was my friend to deceive me like this."

She bursts into tears in the middle of the lounge and an old lady says "Shame," and eyes me like as though I was a bad smell, and the manager approaches courteous and sympathetic and suggests we adjorn for the second act to the Bridal Suit, which place is the customary one for fiendish rows.

So we all three gets into the lift to the great annoyance of all the nosey Parkers, what was just settling down to a joyous interlude.

"Gaby," I says soothing, with a warning look at the miserable Mr. Antony, "you're wrong about me and your hubby what I respect and what is a good pure man. Why should he give me all that money?"

She laughs harsh and the lift boy cowers.

"That's what I'd like to know," she says significant.

We regains the Bridal Suit at this junction, and once inside she lets herself go, and her vener of civilisation drops like a coat from her, and she rushes at me and calls me a paramoor and has to be dragged off me by Mr. Antony.

"Gaby," I says again, "you're barking up the wrong tree. Mr. Antony and me is friends only."

"Then," she screams wild, "how do you account for this, you cat?"

And to my horror she produces the bill from the hotel where I'd interviewed Gertie, what was made out in the name of Madam Antony.

"Date to-day," she hisses, "and you with a hundred and fifty in the bank, also date of to-day."

Well, can you wonder I was hit below the belt? Mr. Antony gazed at me wild and speechless, not knowing why I'd booked a room as Mrs. Antony, poor thing.

It was a horrible moment, and by the time I'd recovered my breath she'd locked herself up in her bedroom, after threatening to divorce him with me as the correspondent, and she'd locked Mr. Antony in with her in case I started vamping him, and the curtain fell on the big scene, amid shrieks of silence.

They both been in there three days now, locked in together, and the

things she calls him through the wall, what I can hear distinct by putting my ear to a wineglass on the wall, turns me green.

Isn't life something awful?

SO THAT'S why I'm packing. I can't give Mr. Antony away after he's give me all that money, can I? And unless he takes courage and confesses Gertie my name's MUD with Gaby. I'm about to do a moonlight flit from Nice, which I'm sick of anyway.

As I pack Ponto keeps bringing me things, and I shouldn't be surprised if he hadn't brung the check book and hotel bill to Gaby, he's that kind of a dog. I think I'll take Ponto with me, he seems a useful animal, and he's better looking and fatter since he ate Gaby's reducing cream. Not that I asked him to bring me Gertie's letter, that was Fate, and you can't do Fate in the eyeball.

Well, one day Gaby may discover how she's wronged me, her pal, what's been ever faithful and true and only done what she done to save her bossom friend from a heartache without any hope of monetary remune. And then she'll be struck by remorse, but I shall be far away. I feel sad and forlorn, and I think I'll wear my jade stockingett in which to travel and put a jade bow on Ponty to match. Yes, I'll do that.

Anyway, I've got a hundred and fifty in the bank, which is better than being shoved over a cliff, and you can go a long way with a fortune of that size.

Not to say a dog like Ponto.

The Pointing Finger

In the city of Rome there formerly stood a statue with right hand extended, and on its finger the words—"Strike here!" Many puzzle solvers pondered over this but without coming to any conclusion. A young priest, however, noticed that when the sun shone on the statue, the shadow of the pointing finger fell on a certain spot. He marked the place and, waiting till midnight, began to dig. At last his spade struck upon something hard, and he soon unbared a trapdoor, which he raised up. He descended a flight of marble steps and found himself in a vast hall where many men were reclining in solemn silence. All about were piles of gold and precious stones. None spoke or took any notice of the intruder who, going on, entered a room in which beautiful women reclined on rich couches. They were equally silent and motionless. Beyond lay a banqueting hall, stables filled with motionless horses, storehouses full of forage and provisions. The priest, in evergrowing wonder, retraced his steps to the entrance hall, which was lit by a vast glowing carbuncle, opposite which stood an archer with bow raised. The arrow was levelled at the jewel. Wishing to take away with him some tangible evidence of the story he had to tell, the priest saw a diamond-hilted dagger lying on a marble table. He put out his hand to it. No sooner had he touched it, than the archer's bow twanged. The arrow sped. The jewel was shattered and all was dark. The staircase was unfindable, and the wretched explorer of mysteries was entombed.

Dead Men Make No Music

By EDWINA LEVIN MACDONALD

A Five-Part Story—Part Four

WHAT HAS ALREADY HAPPENED

Odollee Meynard, *protected by convent walls for fifteen years, receives a summons on her eighteenth birthday to meet her father,* Pierre Meynard, *whom she hasn't seen since she was three. Accordingly, accompanied by a school friend,* Jackie Tarver, *she goes to the ancestral home of the* Meynards *on an island in the Mississippi Delta.*

There she is told that Pierre Meynard *has been dead for thirty years, and she is denounced as an impostor by* Henri Meynard, *the twin brother of* Pierre.

Neither John *nor* Louis, *twin sons of* Henri, *know just what to make of* Odollee's *claim, though they both seem to fall in love with her pale gold beauty immediately. Nor are* Doctor Blackman *or* Judge MacCauley, *old friends of the family, who are trying to solve the mystery about* Meynard House, *at all convinced of who's right.*

There are certain disturbing happenings: Sanchez, *an old Malay serving woman who has made a lot of trouble and whom* Henri *obviously hates, is allowed to stay on. There are ghostly visitations, presumably made by the dead* Pierre. *On occasion ghostly music fills the house.*

On a trip to another island the girls meet a highly cultured deaf-mute, a Mrs. Gerodes, *who, inexplicably, seems familiar to* Jackie. *And a certain* Mrs. Thompson, *whom the boys have asked to come over and chaperon* Odollee *and* Jackie, *receives a rude note from* Henri, *telling her that she's not wanted.*

CHAPTER XXII

AN OUTCAST GRAVE

"IS that the Meynard Monument?" asked Odollee, pointing to the white marble shaft gleaming above the forest.

"Yes. You can't see the tomb from here, though it is very large."

We were walking along the beach road of the main island.

"I should like to see it," she said.

"It's not pleasant walking," John replied. "The shade is so dense that the soil is always damp. Nothing can grow under the trees."

"Mayn't we?" insisted Odollee.

"Of course—if you wish—but I thought——"

"I might not like to see my father's grave? That's my main reason for wanting to go."

"Then, of course——" He left his sentence unfinished.

I wondered if he thought—if Odollee herself did not think of the incongruity of her claiming as her father a man dead thirty years—going to view his grave. Louis asked us to excuse him, saying he would go on and see what the fruit pickers were doing.

We entered a primeval forest, oaks, sycamores and cypress, no knowing how many centuries old, rising out of sticky black muck overlaid by rotting leaves. Nothing grew in this sunless region but a nauseating fungus and toad-stools' mold lifted an inch or more high, like patches of leprous grass that gave under the feet in slime.

Well within the repulsive retreat, yet glimpsed almost at once through the brown columns of the trees, appeared an enormous and splendid tomb. Its receptacle, which the tall shaft topped, was fully ten feet tall by perhaps ten feet wide, like a marble mansion in miniature, its gleaming whiteness sadly blotched and streaked by mold.

It was approached by three marble steps leading to a minature veranda, on one side of which kneeled the statue of a weeping woman. Opposite her a small chair of iron filigree was set.

To the right of the chair, and in the centre of the monument, was a tall wrought-iron door through which you could see the vaults on each side, one above another.

At the end of the narrow passage between the vaults was a beautiful stained-glass window, picturing the Virgin and Child.

"What a shame," I cried, "to have that magnificent thing hidden here!"

Then I saw that modest and lon
ly grave. A low over-ground gra
built of bricks and cement; on
plain top the words:

*Pierre Meynard, son of John Lou
and Maria Meynard. Born M
19th*, 1865. *Died August 27th*, 188

John stood silent, his eyes on th
ground.

I looked up at the splendid tom
of the Meynards standing proudly i
eternal gloom, guarded by fores
giants. And at its back, like th
servants' house, detached from th
great Manor, this small sealed tom
—Pierre Meynard, who had not bee
accounted fit to lie with his father
—no weeping angel—no mourner'
chair—no guarding Virgin—a chea
grave, bricks and cement, outcast i
muck and slime.

With my mind suspended, as i
were, on the chill and trembling air
thoughts tumbling one over another
confused, I thought of the picture in
the dining-room of a laughing boy
who, it was said, had tried to mur
der the brother he loved, then had
taken his own life. . . . His body
ravaged by the sea, washed back
home days later. No inquest. No
laying away in easily accessible
vaults—to be opened at will, but
hidden in a lonely, sealed grave.

Who would know if violence had
been done before the sea had had its
chance? Who could ever know now,
unless Henri Meynard chose to tell,
or the one who had helped him
cover his crime, if crime there had
been.

After a long while Odollee said:
"Do you and Louis intend to settle
the question of which is the rightful
heir by a duel in the tower?"

John looked up blankly.

After a pause, he said: "I hope
Louis and father will consent to a
division. This unfair settlement has
gone on long enough. Too long."

"Yes, thirty years too long," mused Odollee, her eyes on the cement slab. "Two lives have paid the cost of it. That's—as you say—too much."

"Two lives?" echoed John.

She lifted her melancholy eyes to him. "Isn't your father paying with his life? He made no reply, and her eyes returning to the sad little tomb, she went on as to herself: "Oh, how could he? And now he has paid! Poor, poor fellow! How they both——" She broke off, adding, "and it will never be finished—till this desecration is removed."

John stared at her but said not a word.

AS WE approached the garden of the west entrance, Louis came up on horseback. Though we were quite near, he did not look in our direction. His eyes glowered darkly at the black boy who ran forward to catch the contemptuously flung bridle.

However, he bent to pet in turn several big lumbering setter pups that had galloped out to meet him. He was evidently a lover of dogs and was loved by them. The pups trotted at his side, fell over one another in their eagerness to be near him, getting directly in front of him and making his progress difficult.

Joe Tobias, assisted by Mickey, was weeding the lawn. The boy rose hastily as Louis passed, touching his cap to the young master, and in his embarrassment trod on a pup's foot. The dog set up a terrible yelping and Louis, who had not noticed Mickey's greeting, turned on him furiously.

"What do you mean by kicking that dog?" he cried. His tone was so threatening that Mickey dodged as if expecting a blow. Perhaps the suggestion carried by the boy's dodge was responsible—in a flash the tail of a keen little riding whip had wrapped itself around Mickey's right hand. Not a whimper escaped the surprised youngster; but his blue eyes blazed with hate as a small grimy left hand covered the purplish-white welt.

It was so sudden, so uncalled for, that it shocked me out of all reason.

"You beast!" I screamed.

Mickey stood sternly fighting back the tears. The spirit of the thing had hurt him worse than the blow. Odollee ran to him, catching the grimy little hand in both hers, and bending down kissed the great purpling welt.

"That's the first time I've ever kissed a man's hand," she told the boy softly. How lovely, how sweet she could be in her moments of impulse!

Mickey flushed and smiled, saying shyly; "Ah reckon that's wuth a rawhidin'."

John, who had come up, looked Louis straight in the face and said in a low voice: "Are you a Meynard or—a Bardoni?"

The Bardonis were the pirate branch of the family that had brought the cursed jewel to the younger sons.

Louis stood as if stunned by what he had done. Upon John's low-spoken words he took two quick steps toward the boy. "Old man," he said, "I acted the cad. I apologize. If, however, you feel that my apology is not enough, here is the whip." He extended it with his left hand, at the same time holding out his right, back up, to receive a blow.

Mickey's chest swelled perceptibly. "Oh, tha's all right, Mr. Louis. Ah reckon you was worried 'bout somethin'. Le's shake."

Louis grasped the little stained hand in his long nervous white one.

"Micky, you're all right," laughed John; "a regular fellow."

Mickey's hurt completely healed, he went back to work with the composed air of a man to whom years have taught tolerance.

Odollee stretched out her hand to Louis. "That was a fine thing to do," she said, her dark eyes lifted admiringly.

"Fine!" he echoed, taking her hand in surprise.

She spoke very low. "A man of overwhelming passion may upon occasion do an outrageous thing; but only a man with real courage could have given such an apology.

"You see, an apology in itself would have been a cheap escape, because of the very helplessness of the insulted boy, had you not offered to submit yourself to the same insult"—her voice sank lower—"at the hands of one of your laborers. You are capable of great and fine things—beauty as well as—ugliness."

Dark color burned beneath his tan, his black eyes glowed with gratitude and adoration. He bent over her hand, kissed it and said in a voice that caressed: "You have the gift of understanding — these things."

"Perhaps because I, too, am capable of—ugly things," she smiled.

"Rather of great passion," he corrected. "That included everything," he added in a lighter, louder tone.

John had walked away with Joe to give him some directions about trimming a tree, and I was pretending to watch Mickey.

Two Americans could not have been guilty of such a scene in public, so to speak; but the Latins are not ashamed of their emotions.

Watching them out of the corner of my eye, and listening to them, I had a premonition that before the summer was over Louis Meynard would be called upon to display spectacular beauty or ugliness. There would be no quiet surrender on his part. And whatever the outcome it would be spectacular. How spectacular no sixth sense warned me!

John, returning across the lawn looked his surprise at sight of his brother and Odollee holding hands and gazing into each other's faces as if there were no one else in the world.

They turned at his approach, with a belated show of embarrassment.

"Things all right in the field?" asked John.

"Yes. Fruit nearly all in." Then the mobile face darkened: "Father's downstairs."

"That's fine." But John did not look as if he thought it fine. He, too, had read something in Louis' face.

"We'll have a talk this afternoon," he said to Odollee, "and see if we can't arrive at something. We should like to have you and Miss Tarver as our guests all summer—just as things are—but I know you are anxious to get this puzzling matter settled. Of course, we all are.

"Have you spoken to father?" he asked Louis.

Louis hesitated. "I suppose I may as well tell you"—he was looking at Odollee—"you'll have to know—father refuses to see you.

"He's in a terrible state. Has shut himself in the library. Window blinds locked, windows down and doors locked on the inside, as if he thought you might force yourself on him.

"He won't let anybody come in to him but Sanchez. Was locked in there when I came back from Le Petit. I talked to him through the door. Told him about the letters you'd brought. He says he won't

come out or let any of us in until——" He had been speaking rapidly, excitedly. Now he stopped short.

"That's too bad," said Odollee softly. Lifting her sombre eyes, she looked straight at Louis, then at John, and said insolently: "It's too bad because in that case he bids fair to be a life prisoner in the library."

She spoke with slow emphasis in which there was unmistakable threat. They looked at her in astonishment, then turned together without a word toward the house.

Until that moment I don't think it had occurred to either of them that she was more than a beautiful but foolish girl, who, when convinced that she had been duped by some unscrupulous relative, would retire in confusion—or remain as their properly chaperoned and welcome guest.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE CONFERENCE.

I WAS convinced that here was where we would be told a boat was waiting. But this amazing girl I was yoked with calmly proceeded to dress for lunch.

I had no faith in our chances for lunch, but feeling gritty with beach sand, I, too, changed and went on the roof to await developments. Some way my tongue was losing its old time agility and my brain was gaining.

Under the terms of my tenure here I couldn't think aloud, as had previously been my wont, thus I had to withdraw my person from an audience when I wanted to think.

The whole sky had suddenly changed. With a brassy haze, it hung low, like a monstrous veil, slowly descending to smother this fair island. And the trees whispered together excitedly as if in swift and secretive preparation to meet the onslaught of an ancient enemy.

Odollee joined me presently. She was not one of those vain girls who spend an unconscionable time primping; but I had been trained to make a complete change from the skin out; shoes, stockings and hair between five to seven minute curtains —a feat of which the audience thinks little, since it must not only be done swiftly, but exquisitely—so naturally I always waited for her to finish dressing.

She wore a dull blue silk ratineé with gold threads forming the hem and outlining the neck and long loose sleeves. I have sometimes thought each new thing she wore, light or dark, morning or evening, seemed to make her beauty more dazzling and bizarre. The one mistake she never made was to dress bizarrely. Her gowns were cut simply, but smartly, having little trimming, and she wore no jewelry, not even a ring, nor a bandeau in the evening.

Her hair, having no sign of curl or fluffiness, she wound about her small fine head like cloth-of-gold folded snugly turban-wise.

As she had had no opportunity to study the art of dressing, I felt it must be the innate gift of French ancestors.

Now, however, she looked tired, as if weighed down by her own thoughts.

"I don't like the looks of this day," I said, as she came toward the parapet on which I sat.

"Oh, if only I could escape it!" she exclaimed with unexpected passion.

"We could go back to the convent," I said.

"No, no. You can. I must stay. Oh, Jackie, go back if you want to.

I can't ask you to stay on—in all this."

"Do you want me to go?"

"No. Oh no. I want you to stay. But——"

"Then I stay. In spite of last night I don't take much stock in ghosts. I believe the thing I saw was human. Ghosts don't fan the air with their clothes. I guess I'm a hard-boiled egg. Been in hot water of one sort or another all my life. Road shows soon knock the softness out of a person."

"You are the sanest girl I ever knew," she said, adding: "And the most observing. But it doesn't matter how much one observes if one knows how to be silent."

I knew she was giving me a hint. "Well, I guess I can keep my trap shut if the ghost will kindly stay out of my room," I laughed. "But it's a little too much to expect a girl to keep her mouth closed when she finds a strange man or ghost making free with her bedroom in the middle of the night."

She laughed. "Yes, it is. I quite agree." Then she put her arm around me. "I was the most fortunate in the choice of a friend. The Holy Mother, no doubt, directed me."

Sing Lu came up promptly at one o'clock to tell us the gentlemen were waiting for us in the dining-room. I felt, considering Odollee's insolence, we ought to refuse; but I was abominably hungry and it was a long way to the eats of the mainland. Moreover, Odollee seemed to take it as a matter of course.

And so did "the gentlemen." Doctor Blackman was absorbed in thought and abstracted, the Judge appeared in high good humor, and the two Meynards were pleasantly solicitous of our comfort, insisting on our eating heartily, taking turns at telling funny negro stories and pointedly including us in everything that was said. Not too pointedly. Just the correct hosts, determined to make us at home.

One less sensitive to the moods of the others would have thought they were delighted by our presence. But to me the change in them was like a fog, which, though soft and warm and friendly, seemingly hid onrushing danger.

John's soul may have embraced Odollee's soul the night before, and Louis' may have been questing for an embrace this morning, but they were leagues away from her now.

AS WE rose from the table, smiles dropped away from the two dark faces and John said: "Miss Meynard, we should like to talk over the peculiar situation in which we find ourselves, if it meets with your approval, and see what there is to be done."

"Certainly," she said.

"We regret that father won't be present; but we thought it advisable to ask Doctor Blackman and Judge MacCauley to meet with us. If you care to have your friend——"

"Thank you," said Odollee.

Louis led the way to the gloomy drawing-room into which we had been shown by Sanchez the previous afternoon.

"The first thing," said John, when we were all seated, "naturally concerns the letter you brought our father. Miss Meynard, he refuses to accept it; and I take it that your position is set forth fully in that letter."

Odollee nodded assent. She was very pale but cool.

"I suppose you know something of the nature of the letter? Its claims, so to speak."

Again she signified assent.

"Perhaps you'd rather not tell us—perhaps we shouldn't know; but since father, I regret to say, refuses

to see you and we have no other way of taking the matter up with you, it seems necessary that we know what the letter contains."

"Of course," she said.

He waited. Then when she showed no sign of speaking: "The letter is addressed to father, so naturally, unless you tell us——"

"It is addressed to your father," broke in Odollee, "but it is not sealed. An open letter is never private."

"Quite right," put in the Judge. "If the letter had been private it would have been sealed. An open letter is there for anybody to read who chooses."

The brothers demurred for a moment; then Louis took the envelope from his pocket. "Well, unless we do, we are at a dead-lock. Miss Meynard doesn't seem inclined to give any information on her own part."

He opened the letter. John waited for him to finish. It was quite long, covering several pages of large letter paper.

Never have I seen emotions pass in such rapid succession over one face — incredulity, mocking amusement, then indignation, horror and at last blind fury. I honestly think he was stone blind when he extended the letter in the general direction of John. His hands shook, his eyes were dead black and utterly blank.

John's color came and went — paling and darkening. He read the letter slowly, carefully and, when he had finished, looked at Odollee.

"Do you know what's in this letter, Miss—Meynard?" He hesitated before pronouncing the name. "That is, have you read it?"

"Yes. I was instructed to read it."

Without a word he handed the paper to Judge MacCauley.

Louis started forward as if unwilling that another should see it.

John stopped him with a gesture.

"The accusation, absurd as it is, must be disproved. And it can't be done in secret."

When the Judge had finished he handed the letter back to John, who in turn handed it to Doctor Blackman.

While the Doctor read, the Judge talked in low tones to John.

"Your father will have to see that letter."

"He refuses."

"Then you'll have to put all the servants out of the house and read it to him through the door. I think if you read the third paragraph to him, he'll come out of his own accord."

"He'll ignore it."

"No man dare ignore such an accusation. To do so is to acknowledge his guilt. He's got to defend himself."

Doctor Blackman's first question after reading the letter was a surprising one. "How long has your father been addicted to morphia?"

"Do you dare to intimate that you believe a single word in that infamous document?" demanded Louis.

"My question was not based on anything contained in this paper," replied the doctor with dignity. "I went up to see your father this morning and he was in a highly nervous state due to——"

"Due to a shock received yesterday," broke in John.

"As a doctor of medicine as well as of science, I must differ with you. Your father was in a state of morphia insanity. He was not at that time concerned about the jewel which I understand he saw yesterday, nor about the presence of—your guests. He was a man demented for drugs. In fact, he asked me if I couldn't give him something. And

when I told him I couldn't he literally threw me out of the room."

The brothers appeared stunned. After a brief silence, John said: "I'm sorry, Doctor, if father——"

"Tut, tut! I never hold anything against a man obsessed for drugs. Poor devils, they are the most pitiable creatures on earth."

"But how is it possible without our knowing it? How has he gotten it? He has not left the island in three years, not since he began to break."

"You have a physician on the island, haven't you?"

"Yes. But father and he haven't spoken for fifteen years. If it were not that it would have been next to impossible to get another physician out here, father would have shipped him long ago. But with all our people, and medical aid so far away, we couldn't dispense with his services."

"Probably fell out over the doctor's refusal to supply him with drugs. Evidently your druggist is less conscientious."

"The doctor is also the druggist."

"Then somebody smuggles it to him. But what I meant to say is this: This paper, which purports to be the testimony of a dying man, was written by the same hand as the two letters shown you yesterday, and which you and your brother maintained were written by your father.

"The Judge, who has been considerably taken up with these matters for some years, said unequivocally that the hand that wrote those letters to the Mother Superior of St. Cecelia Convent wrote to you and your brother while in school in New Orleans.

"This letter, so far as I can see, was also written by that hand. What is your opinion, Judge?"

"Same hand. Not a doubt of it."

"Well, then," continued the Doctor, before John or Louis could speak, "the explanation reduces itself back to drug insanity. Your father in one of his periods of hallucination wrote this letter, signing his brother's name and making charges against himself which he at that time believed to be true.

"Your father and Pierre, being twins, were very close; much closer than brothers, ordinarily. Almost one body; one soul. Indeed, it is not only possible, but highly probable that under drug hallucination your father may have believed himself to be his dead twin."

Odollee's eyes were downcast; her hands at rest in her lap.

That she was under instruction to say nothing—to make no sign—until the proper time, which was clearly not now, I was convinced. Whatever accusation that paper contained, she was to have no part in it. Indeed, she confirmed my thought in its inception.

Without looking up, she said: "You must realize that I neither wrote that letter, nor came here of my own volition; that I am not responsible for any of its statements.

"It is not in human nature that you wouldn't resent my presence here as its bearer. But it must also appear to you that it would be inadvisable for me to return to New Orleans before the matter it involves is settled.

"You must realize that sooner or later it *must* be settled and the sooner the better—especially as I am as averse to settling it in court as you must be. For such a settlement, even if nothing were proved by my side, would involve a great scandal; rake up that old matter of the duel — or at least the burial, without ceremony, of one brother

by the other, who by that burial succeeded to a large estate.

"Many people will testify to the fact that Pierre Meynard wanted to repudiate the succession which has no legal support in this country except by will—and there was no will. He was legal heir to one half of the estate—an arrangement which Henri Meynard objected to; preferring a settlement without benefit of law—and the settlement was made by a burial.

"You can see that no matter how it ends—for or against me, your father will lose—and the name of Meynard will be irreparably sullied.

"I wish to avoid that as much as you do, for"—she now lifted her eyes, looking straight at John—"I am a Meynard. And the name is sacred to me." Her eyes were once more covered. "For these reasons it seems wiser for all of us that I continue to impose upon your hospitality."

She had spoken like an amateur reciting a long memorized speech; no expression or inflection. A didactic speech *written to be read, not spoken.*

"Quite right," put in the Judge. "Very sensibly spoken. I might say, amazingly well thought out for a girl of eighteen — covering the ground as carefully and clearly as a lawyer might do it. And well delivered," he added with twinkling eyes.

"I realize Miss—Meynard," said John, "that you neither wrote the letter nor are responsible for it. I believe you are being strangely victimized by some one, and I realize fully that your position is an embarrassing one.

"Especially do I appreciate your attitude toward the question of scurrilous publicity, and agree with you that this matter must be settled, if possible, out of court. As, no doubt, it can.

"The discovery that our father is addicted to drugs and, without a doubt, a victim of hallucinations, puts a very different face on the letters you bring. But while disposing of the charges it brings, it does not dispose of your connection with the matter — a connection which dates back fifteen years. And that, too, must be cleared up. Please consider yourself at home here in the meantime."

He, too, spoke like one reciting a speech—with more expression, perhaps, but carefully choosing his words. He looked at his brother, who paced back and forth, hands clinching and unclinching, his face pale and working distressfully. "Louis, I speak for you also?"

How careful they were, these brothers, not to infringe upon the rights of each other, or appear to assume leadership. And how much stronger John looked standing quietly against the mantel.

"Of course," said Louis shortly, without pausing in his restless walk.

CHAPTER XXIV

CREOLE LOVE

DOCTOR BLACKMAN, who had been glancing through the letter, going back to different parts, now spoke as though there had been no break in the original argument.

"Especially would your father's hallucination be likely to take this strange form if there lingered in his mind any sense of wrong done his brother."

"But," interposed Louis, pausing sharply, "Uncle Pierre agreed to everything that transpired. If wrong was done, it was by him."

"The only established fact, it ap-

pears," said the Judge dryly, "is that the tide brought in Pierre Meynard's body after the storm. You say you can prove that much. It can also be proved that he was buried without a coroner's inquest to determine the cause of his death. And this paper, without doubt written by your father, under the influence of drugs, gives a new version of the whole episode in the tower."

"I protest against your evident attitude of accepting that dastardly paper against father," cried Louis. "If you believe——"

"I believe nothing. I am merely weighing all the possibilities, as I told you."

"Well," said John quietly, "accepting the theory, Judge, that the paper was written by father under an hallucination—and I admit it seems the only possible explanation—can the statements made while in this condition be accepted as truth?"

"No. And yet, if by chance they are true, they would account for Sanchez's strange transfer of affection; for her hold over your father and for his hallucination concerning his brother's ghost."

"They would account for the presence of his brother's ghost in his house," corrected Doctor Blackman calmly.

"Well, let that go," snapped the Judge.

Louis buried his face in his hands. "I won't believe it."

"Nor I," said John. "Not unless father himself tells me so. And even then I would not believe it."

"Have you ever seen your father undressed?" Judge MacCauley asked with seeming irrelevance.

"No."

"If his lung had been pierced by a sword at any time in his life the scar will be there. If there is no such scar, you'd have to believe your father has not given a true account of what happened in the tower, wouldn't you?"

"Yes," replied John in a low voice.

"And by the same sign, you'd be compelled to recognize the possibility of truth in at least that part of this paper which gives another account of that night."

"Oh, my God," said Louis with something like a sob, "I can't endure this theoretical tearing down of my father's character. He carries a wound to prove the lie of that paper. I know it as well as if I'd seen it.

"If he'd only come out and *show* us—clear himself of that charge." His voice rose. "If things didn't occur in the tower as he claims—then don't you see what it opens up?"

"Yes, it lays him open to suspicion on the second count set forth in this paper."

"That I won't tolerate even in theory, Judge," said John sternly. "What a hot-headed boy of twenty may do in sudden passion, what he may afterward do to cover his mistake, is one thing—the other oversteps passion. It is heinous, cowardly, and I will not have it enter even into speculation."

"You are quite right."

A silence fell, aching in the ears like the screaming of whistles, the ringing of bells. The shadows of the big room seemed to come alive. The swish of the Gulf sounded through the open windows like sneering laughter.

So Odollee had brought to Stone Gables a new account of that night so long ago, when the storm ripped the island apart, houses, trees and human lives paying toll to the fury of the Gulf's malign passion—and two young men, two boys, with the hot blood of France, the treacherous blood of Spain, flowing through their veins, fought a duel in an isolated tower for possession of a great

estate—a friendly bout which ended in tragedy—tragedy to the boy who greatly loved his brother and a lifelong toll to the brother who lived and hated. As this strange, silent girl had said, at the foot of Pierre Meynard's tomb, Henri had paid a great price for his wreath, a price inconsistent with innocence.

A heavy curtain moved oddly over one of the doors. My nerves drawn to breaking, without a thought I sprang up and dashed into a small den at the back of the drawing-room.

In the centre of the little room was the savage old negress, now in a yellow turban, her hoop earrings flapping against her gaunt face as she polished the legs of a tabouret with swift strokes of her strong hands.

And framed in the opposite doors between portieres, which masked every opening on this floor, appeared the back of a nun, brief, yet cleanly cut in her flowing black robe. Then the portieres fell together.

There was something about the square shoulders under the enveloping robes, something in the erect carriage of the head and the tall form that made me think of—the Mother Superior of St. Cecelia Convent.

A flash of thought—and then I could not be certain—it might have been any tall nun with spare form and erect carriage; it wasn't fair to think of Mother in a furtive situation—a secret guest in this house—a woman whose consecration and nobility of character was unquestioned. I was ashamed of my thought. It had come without volition.

Sanchez turned her baleful eyes on me. She appeared more than usually savage, but she spoke softly in her broken English.

"Mam'selle, she weesh somet-ing?"

"No," I said. "I saw the portiere move. I wanted to see who it was."

"I haf been feex heem."

"What made you run away when you heard me coming and pretend to be polishing a table?"

"I no run. No see Mam'selle. Curtain she theeck. I have feenish. I move. Dass so, yes."

"Well, I must say you move fast."

"Oh, yees," she smiled as if vastly pleased, wrinkling horribly, exposing her black uneven teeth. "Move lack young gel." But she saw I knew she was lying and her black eyes snapped angrily.

I went back into the parlor. The men paid no attention to me. They were not interested in the erratic dashes of a girl who was little and blonde and altogether a nonentity in the intrigue of this house.

But Odollee gave me a look which seemed to say: "Little fool! Keep still! Keep your mouth shut!"

"In my opinion," Doctor Blackman was saying, "this document written in your father's handwriting points to a drug deranged mind brooding over real or fancied wrong to his brother, and cannot in any sense be accepted as a true account of what happened in the tower, nor of succeeding events."

"Very well," said the Judge. "Let's put the entire thing down to hallucination. Then where does this young lady figure?

"A girl of eighteen raised in a convent could hardly have framed so fantastic a scheme for making claims as legal heir to half this estate. Even for argument's sake, supposing her to be a clever adventuress, where did she acquire her knowledge of your family history? A knowledge which certainly is not general.

"It would be easy to ascertain from the nuns the truth or fallacy of her statements concerning her tenancy of the convent, her manner of coming there.

"Who put her there? Who paid for her education? What about that stone and the duplicate letters in your father's handwriting?

"Is Henri Meynard also responsible for all this? If so, to what end? To disrupt his own house? I think we must find another explanation of her. If she were his daughter, as was my snap-shot theory last night, he could easily acknowledge her if he wanted her to have a share of the estate and stop this foolish entail business and leave her a share. There would be no need for all this intrigue to accomplish what could be done by gift. No need to bring her here now and then refuse to see her. But, why refuse to see her, anyhow, unless he had previous knowledge of her existence and is frightened by her appearance?"

"Her mention of Uncle Pierre might answer your last question," said John.

"In my opinion," interposed Doctor Blackman, "as soon as your father obtains the drug which he has run out of, he will behave with more sanity. Until he does get it, it's useless to expect that he will act with reason."

"Then I should say," said the Judge, "the best thing for us to do is to drop this useless theorizing and wait until he is in condition to go into it with us. Unless Miss Meynard has something to say."

"I have nothing to add to that letter," replied Odollee. "I've told you all there was to tell about myself. That letter tells you what was unknown to me until a few weeks ago."

"Just so. You are as much at sea, I take it, as any of us. I move that we adjourn. Next meeting to be called when Henri Meynard is more himself. The two old men rose, and after a brief hesitation, as if waiting for possible objection went out.

ODOLLEE sat still, her eyes downcast. The brothers were sunk in gloomy thought. I waited for her to make a move. She lifted her eyes to John. "We three are the victims," she said. "I wish we might be friends."

They both came to her as if drawn on a single wire and, as she rose to meet them, each caught one of her hands in his two. "We are friends," said John.

"We know, whoever is guilty, you are innocent," cried Louis. "And we both love you. Don't we, John?"

John laughed. "I'm afraid we both do, Louis."

These Creoles! Could anything have been more delightfully outrageous?

I stood up to remind them of my presence. But I might as well have been invisible.

I wanted to stay for the curtain of this scene; but when it came to twin brothers making love to a girl, both at one time, I felt that somebody was de trop.

And I slipped out.

I wandered about for a while downstairs, stood for a long time before the picture of the laughing-eyed Pierre—wondering, wondering.

Sanchez passed through the room twice. The second time she stopped.

"Fo' w'y yo' look heem?" Her old face was suspicious, almost accusitive.

"Because I like him better than the big dub beside him. He's lovely. I wish I'd known him."

Her eyes softened unexpectedly.

Heem very goo'. Heem mah leetle baba."

"Then, if you liked him, why did you try to cheat him for Henri?" I demanded furiously. "You knew he was the heir."

"Yes, me know. Me bad. Me debil. But yo' no be skert me 'cause you go' hair lac sun. Eyes too lac sky—jus' lac mah leetle Maria. An' yo' know mah baba Pierre no bad man. Ah, me debil. Me debil. But yo' no be skert me. Me see yo' coom no harm."

She left me staring. Because I had hair and eyes like her leetle Maria, and believed her baba Pierre was not bad, I was not to be scared of her. She'd even promised to see that I came to no harm.

Odollee and the twins came in and John invited Odollee to go outdoors and inspect a century plant which he said was due to bloom that night. Louis and I, not being included in the invitation, he presently excused himself, saying he had work to do.

I decided to go up and investigate the throat of that chimney in our rooms. To my surprise I found Louis on the roof gazing down over the parapet into the yard, a strained expression on his face. At sight of me he laughed in an embarrassed way.

"My brother has evidently fallen in love with our beautiful guest," he said with a wave of his slim dark hand toward the rubber tree below, under which, in a big hammock, John and Odollee sat obviously absorbed in each other.

"Oh, hardly so soon."

"We Creoles have no need to wait. Love is not calculated with us as with—the Americans. It is an avalanche over which we have no control."

"It would be terrible if you both fell in love with her," I said, watching his dark face.

He flushed. "No danger of that, for I have fallen in love with you."

"Don't kid me," I laughed. "I might believe you and——"

"I want you to believe me," he declared, catching my hand in a passionate gesture. "I am mad for you. You are an actress. You aren't bound by the conventions that enslave other women. You are free and I am free and I want you."

I drew back in horror. "How dare you insult me because I am an actress—in your own house! You cad!"

"Insult! Hah! I've paid you a compliment. I'm a passionate man, but not a promiscuous one. I don't allow myself to be stirred by women. Good women are inexperienced and not worth the effort of seduction. And they are fools—ready to make trouble for a man. The really bad women are disgusting. You are neither good nor bad, and I am on fire for you."

He started toward me, his arms outstretched. I turned to run. He caught me at the stair and dragged me back. I fought with him silently, unwilling to cry out and make a scene. But I very soon discovered my mistake. My wishes were of no consequence to him. My puny strength was nothing against those encircling arms of steel.

Reason, gentlemanly instincts were lost to him. A savage held me. Savage lips closed mine. He began moving with me toward one of the gable rooms. My arms pinioned, my breath shut off, I fought with my feet every step across the wide court.

As he was reaching for the doorknob, two startling things happened: A burst of music tore across the silence of the island, descending from the trees above our heads—and Sanchez appeared in our doorway.

Louis let go of me, his face blanching. He stared at the old woman, who grinned evilly at him.

"Yo' feex fo' have bad luck. Me, ah don' have tell yo' two time fo' leave gel be. Thass so. Yes?"

"You old——" he began.

"Debil," she grinned. "Thass so. An' yo' mah baba. Debil mo' bad as baba. Thass so too. Yes?"

With a muttered curse he turned toward the stair, then paused and lifted his face to the flood of music so close upon us, because issuing from the treetops. Then he came back briskly.

"Miss Tarver, I'm ashamed. Will you forgive me? You looked so sweet. I lost myself. But I promise it won't happen again."

"I'll forgive you," I said, "but I promise you, too, that I'll never again be on a position where it can happen."

"I'm sorry." His face was shamed, his eyes humbly pleading. "I hope —you won't—mention the matter to your friend. It might upset her. And there is already so much—I swear it won't happen again."

"Thass so. No mo'. Me swear too."

I felt that this old creature who had appeared so fortuitously; who clearly had some power over this man of savage passions not in accord with her position as foster-mother, even; who threatened him and reassured me—was in agreement with him about my not telling Odollee.

I said: "I don't blab. If I did I wouldn't be here with Odollee. Make your minds easy about that part. But," turning to him, "if you ever try it again, the question of who is heir to this place will be settled for you."

Louis laughed stridently, but he said: "Thank you."

Sanchez said: "Coom. Yo' n bettah stay downstair."

I followed her, leaving Louis the enjoyment of the aerial conc which I now was convinced he h a hand in, he and Sanchez. P made the records and she turn them on to be radioed from co cealed receivers among the tre They were in some ugly plot gether. That was her power o him.

CHAPTER XXV

THE TRAGEDY OF THE LOCKED ROO

THOUGH I had passed m word to Odollee to "pur my soul," as Mother Superi would say, "of the sin of i quisitiveness," it seemed to me a solutely unnecessary cruelty on h part not to make complete and i mediate report on the twin's lov making. But not one word did s say. That it had been a pleasa experience for her I knew by h bland smile as we dressed for di ner. Nor did I mention my own e perience.

Of course, we "dressed" for di ner. I'd suspected it the night b fore when Louis said: "We dress not, as we choose."

Odollee said on this evenin "Jackie, put on your turquoise ta feta for dinner. You look lovely i it." And I knew she'd been i formed on the subject of dinne clothes in this house. She wore pale pink tissue which made her s beautiful that she looked unreal- like one of those inhumanly perfe French manikins in a show windo come alive.

"Odollee, are there any nuns o this island?" I asked abruptly.

"Yes, two who teach the childre and nurse the sick when necessary."

She hadn't been here any longe than I—hadn't been anywhere

hadn't been; but she knew the island as if she had lived on it for years.

"You don't think that Mother Superior is by any chance here?" I asked.

She was taking the pins from her hair before the mirror. She turned on me, as if angry. "Why do you ask that?"

"Because I saw a back today that looked like hers."

"Where?"

"In the den back of the parlor when I ran in there to see who moved the curtain. She was just going out another door. I saw only her back."

"Nonsense. What would Mother be doing on this island?"

"Maybe visiting the other nuns."

"Visiting them in this house? And not making her presence known to us when she knows we are here?" She gave me a look of disgust and turned back to the mirror.

A little mad, I flounced into the bathroom.

When I came back, without looking at me, Odollee said: "What made you think of Mother if you saw only the back of the nun today? All nuns look alike from the back."

"I don't know why I thought of her. Maybe because she's tall and thin and square-shouldered and the other sisters in St. Cecelia are shorter and inclined to plumpness. But you needn't get peeved about it. I couldn't help what I thought."

"I'm not peeved. Only it is so foolish."

If it were so foolish, why did she return to the subject merely to point out my foolishness and to advance that asinine point about all Sisters' backs looking alike?

I heard someone enter the sitting-room. "Me I coom fo' see yo' wan' leetle fire," Sanchez called.

"No, thank you, Sanchez," replied Odollee, going swiftly into the living-room. I was at the dresser and could see the old woman now at the fireplace. She set a slender vase holding a magnolia blossom on the mantel and went out without a word.

Odollee turned, flashed a glance at me, and lowered her heavy white lids.

"Fine linen and delicate perfume wants to see her immediately," I thought, "and she's worried about how she's going to get rid of me."

I finished dressing hurriedly. "I think I'll go down," I said.

"Don't go down, wait here a few minutes," she replied, and there was no mistaking the relief in those big sombre eyes. She wrapped my Paisley shawl around her. Then, looking very straight at me: "I'll be gone only a few minutes. You won't leave till I get back, will you, Jackie?"

Her meaning was clear. "I won't leave this room till I have a guarantee that I won't run into anything not intended for me to see or hear," I laughed. "One runs into enough in this house without trying. I'm no glutton for mystery unless I'm sure the book will explain all in the last chapter."

"It will," she said unsmilingly.

TRUE to her word, she was gone but a few minutes. I was dressed and sitting on the bed.

"Poor little Jackie!" She smiled wanly. "But what would I do without you? You are so vital and brave. You give me strength."

I looked at her in surprise. "Well, it seems to me you have the strength of a tiger all on your own. You know, Odollee, you sort of remind me of a dozing tiger. So soft and beautiful to look at; but deadly under your calm. Just waiting to be roused. I've often tried to think

what it is you are like—so peaceful during all that talk this afternoon, sure of yourself and unafraid—and now I know—a dozing tiger."

She laughed dryly. "A tiger cub, Jackie. And dreadfully afraid, oh, so dreadfully." Her eyes held me solemnly.

"Of Henri Meynard?" I asked, forgetting my promise.

"No. *For* him."

"For him! Well, if that's all that you have to be afraid of, I think you can rest easy. That old man will take care of number one, or I'm no guesser."

She finished dressing, and I noticed her hands trembled.

I was trembling a little myself inside. I had a presentiment that all my questions were about to be answered and that I wasn't going to care for the answers. Odollee, who already knew them, was—dreadfully afraid.

The amazing thing was that she was afraid *for* Henri Meynard. Not of him.

THE twins were waiting for us at the foot of the grand stairway and neither was in the least aware of the fact that I am really very pretty—especially in turquoise taffeta with a turquoise band around my light hair, which is naturally curly.

Louis was so cool, so courteous, that, recalling that disgraceful scene on the roof, I could hardly credit my senses. At dinner they both worshiped Odollee openly—and were quite friendly toward each other, too.

Had you been a stranger at that table you would have thought there wasn't a trouble in this house. Even Odollee seemed to have forgotten that she was afraid for Henri Meynard. In the convent I had often marveled at the ability of Creole girls to lay off trouble as easily as one changes one's dress—one minute sunk in Spanish gloom, brooding, tragic; the next, overwhelming you with French frivolity, light-hearted and gay.

But the girls, of course, had no real troubles. I now saw that whatever threatened, however worried a Creole may be, he will not let trouble interfere too greatly with pleasure.

And what could be more pleasurable than to dine in a magnificent dining-room under crystal candelabra, on finest linen and silver plates, with two blacks serving everybody in their best clothes, fronted by champagne and surrounded by gay *conversatione*?

Let the heavens fall—we will be happy while we may—trouble can wait. This was the spirit which frolicked around that table.

But for certain muffled sounds which issued from the library I would have thought the past thirty odd hours a bad dream; the only reality this charming hour.

Apparently nobody except a small blonde person in turquoise taffeta heard those dim but terrifying sounds from the library, and she pretended not to hear.

Sanchez passed through the dining-room with an elaborate tray, but no one took any notice of her, nor even paused when the opening of a door increased the volume of the noise.

The twins were obviously inured to the display of "artistic temperament" on the part of friend father.

We had just finished our coffee when Sanchez entered. "Mist Henri, ee say Mees Dollee she coom fo' talk in liberry."

The two old men kept their seats, but Louis, Odollee and I sprang up like jacks-in-a-box. John was already standing.

"Does he want us, too, Sanchez?" John asked. His face was very pale.

"Noo. Ee say she coom. Ee sen' fo' you w'en ee ready."

For the briefest space Odollee hesitated, looking at me as if she wanted me to come with her. Then: "I'll be back soon, Jackie."

Louis walked out with her, but returned in a short while.

All the gaiety of the evening had been arrested as by a lightning flash, leaving charred fields where but a moment before smiling verdure had been. The doctor rose. "I think I'll go up to my room and read a while."

"I'll be in my room, too," said the judge, addressing John significantly.

They went out together. The brothers tried to preserve the amenities, but finally made an excuse about some accounts to go over. I sat there staring at Pierre's portrait.

The man fascinated me. Not merely because of the mystery which surrounded him, but because there was something beautiful in his face, and also incongruous to the tragedy connected with him. Moreover, something was tugging at my consciousness. Something in that pictured face tugged at my memory—tugged insistently, but dimly. For I was not thinking of him, but of Odollee alone with that terrible old man.

How still they were! Not a sound from the library. How had she dared go in there? He was strong as an ox. He could kill her with his bare hands, throw her out in the muck of the south yard, which was used by nobody but strangers and hidden from view by a ten-foot Australian pine hedge.

THE servants had just finished clearing the table when there came a blood-curdling cry from the library —a man's scream of unspeakable rage and terror. Then—a woman's wild scream—and a shot.

The next thing I knew, John, Louis and I were at the library door, servants trooping in from every direction, the Doctor and Judge coming three steps at a time down the stairs.

John was tearing at the doorknob, throwing his shoulder against it. Beyond it I could hear a muffled sound like a dog whimpering.

"Open the door!" shouted John.

"I can't," wailed Odollee. And then I knew it was she who was whimpering. "It's locked."

"The key's inside!" John cried.

"No! No! In his pocket!"

"Get it from him."

"I can't! Oh, I can't! For God's sake, come!"

Louis disappeared into the music room behind the library, returning at once. "Locked, too," he said.

They each snatched a log from the wood box.

"Stand clear!" shouted John to Odollee.

They began pounding on the door. But the doors of this house were built in early days—not glued together. They had hardly made a dent when Sing Lu came sliding up, his sandals dragging, and thrust an axe at John.

In a few seconds the magnificent door had been splintered and we went through it with subway politeness—white and black. Caste forgotten.

The room was almost in darkness. One lamp burned very low on a table in a far corner. But there was no mistaking the tragedy before us.

In an arm chair across the hearth the big form of Henri Meynard, his head lopped hideously forward, legs outstretched, arms hanging over the chair arms. A pungent odor of powder and burnt cloth assailed us.

Odollee sat on one side of the door whimpering. The men stood as if unable to move.

In the futile way one does inconsequential things in great moments,

I stepped forward and picked up a handkerchief which had fallen from the dead man's left hand.

My action seemed to awaken John. In one stride he reached his father and tore open his dressing gown. As I rose I saw two things simultaneously—that there was no blood on the white shirt front, and *the face* of Henri Meynard.

The great head rolled to one side then back to his bosom. But the glimpse was enough to drive one insane. I let out a scream which was taken up by the negroes.

Judge MacCauley ordered them from the room—unnecessarily, for they were tumbling out. The heavy portieres dropped over the splintered door after them. John and Louis fell on their knees, one on each side of their father, each holding one of his arms, each resting his head against it. Doctor Blackman was bending over the dead man, examining him. "Strangulation," he murmured. "Neck broken."

Judge MacCauley bent to look at a hideous mark above the white shirt collar. After that one scream I stood frozen, seeing, against my will, a picture of horror so great that it was never to leave me. Never could I describe that black and bloated face. No wonder Odollee had gone mad. She was still sitting on the floor.

"Oh, no, no!" she was saying. "Oh, no! You wouldn't do that!" Then a scream. "You fiend!" Her eyes roving.

I went to her, caught her by the arm. "Odollee!" I cried.

Her roving eyes lifted briefly without recognition, then drifted away. "I can't," she said. "His pocket."

I stooped down beside her, shaking her, talking to her, and she fell to weeping in my arms, saying over and over—"Oh, no! No! You wouldn't do that!" . . . Then burst into violent weeping. A delicate perfume came to me. I recollected Henri Meynard's handkerchief, flung it from me. Judge MacCauley saw my action and picked up the handkerchief.

"Whose is this?"

"His," I said, pointing, but holding my eyes from the dead man.

"Where'd you get it?"

I told him, and he slipped it into his pocket.

"It is, of course, impossible," said the judge, "that a woman could have done this. She might have gotten the rope over his head, but only a powerful man could have broken the neck of a man on his feet. Especially a man of such bulk."

"Rope! Where's any rope? And how do you know he was on his feet?" demanded Doctor Blackman in one sentence.

"I know he was on his feet by his position and the position of the shot he fired in the floor. He was not only on his feet, but about three feet from his chair. He was either standing, while in conversation with Miss Odollee, or had leaped up suddenly and was advancing on some one. He was in the act of reaching for his gun——"

"Gun!" Both boys looked up.

"You will find a gun in the right pocket of his dressing gown."

Louis drew the gun from his father's pocket.

"There is a hole burned in his pocket," the Judge went on, pointing to a hole in the rich fabric of the robe. "But though he fired the gun unwittingly in his pocket, the discharge is not at his feet and near the chair. It is about three feet in front of the chair and did not enter the floor glancingly, as would have happened had he been sitting.

"The charge entered straight down. He was up and, as I started to say, in the act of reaching for his gun

when a surprise attack caught him from behind and under the shock he fired without drawing."

"Why do you say the attack was made from behind if he was in the act of drawing to shoot some one evidently in front?" asked the Doctor.

"Because in the first place if the person he was about to fire on had been near enough to attack him he would have fired from his chair. That he didn't, argues a surprise of some sort, which caused him to leap up and think of his gun afterward.

"In the second place, see the pile of the carpet—pulled back in two deep streaks as if a heavy piece of furniture having only two rollers had been dragged over it. Clearly he was jerked off his feet and dragged back to the chair. Those are the marks made by his heels.

"He was, without doubt, dead by the time he reached his seat. Neck broken probably with the first powerful yank of the rope."

"Why do you say rope? There's no rope around his neck."

"How otherwise could a man, any man, break the neck of another, especially a man of huge strength, except by lassoing him from the back, so that he had no warning either to evade or to brace against it? In no other way can a man be practically *hung* on his feet.

"And even at that the man who did it was not only an athlete but an expert hangman. He knew how to complete the job with one yank of his powerful arms. No struggling and slow strangulation. Meynard never knew what struck him. He lay exactly as he fell into his chair."

"Then, of course, that precludes the idea of——" Doctor Blackman looked at Odollee.

"Oh, quite. A physical impossibility for her. But she knows who did it. She faced the murderer, saw him prepare the noose and swing it over Meynard's head."

"She must have tried to warn him," I cried. "Her scream——"

"Yes, I think she did. But he screamed first—at sight, I think, of the assailant in front of him; the one he was about to shoot."

"But he might have been about to shoot her and merely screamed in rage. I heard him do that yesterday."

"It's possible."

"But there's no rope." Doctor Blackman had been searching the floor for some seconds. The brothers after that one lifting of their heads, and exclamation in chorus at mention of the gun, had dropped back into grief-stricken postures.

"Oh, the murderer probably took it away with him." The Judge walked to the door beyond the fireplace and behind Henri's chair and turned the knob. "Locked on the other side," he said.

"This, of course, is where the murderer came in." He crossed the hearth and tried the other door flanking the fireplace. It, too, was locked.

"Miss Tarver, will you go around and unlock these doors? The keys must be on the other side."

I WENT through the splintered hall door around to the music room, which was at the back of the library; the two rooms connected by the two locked doors. The servants were huddled in the hall, frightened, whispering. I wondered vaguely why Sanchez was not among them.

"There were no keys on the other side," I said returning to the library. "And there is none on the inside of the hall door we broke in."

"Naturally," said the Judge. "I imagined as much."

The doctor was bending over Odollee. She made no sign of seeing

him. Kept saying: "His pocket. I can't. His pocket." She did not flinch when he lifted each eyelid. He rose and stood thinking.

Judge MacCauley laid his hand on John's shoulder. "Boys, I think we'd better see what's in your father's pocket. I believe there's no coroner. So we must handle the matter as best we can."

The brothers rose dry-eyed and went together to the hearth, where they stood with heads bowed together on the mantel. John put his arm around Louis' shoulder.

Judge MacCauley went through the dead man's pockets, bringing out some papers, a small bottle of clear liquid and *three keys*. He smelled the liquid and dropped it in his own pocket with the handkerchief. Lifting the portieres, he tried one of the keys on the splintered door. The second turned the lock. The other two keys fitted the music-room doors.

"All doors locked on the inside and the keys in his own pocket," the old man muttered.

He and the doctor turned to the windows, trying each in turn. They, too, were locked on the inside. The sashes were heavy and swollen in the casings, due to the unending dampness of this side of the house. The men had great difficulty in raising two of them. The other three they could not budge. The outside blinds of the two they succeeded in raising were locked on the inside.

"Impossible to have opened one of these windows from the outside," Judge MacCauley said as if to himself, "or for a woman to have opened them to admit anybody. She couldn't have done it anyhow with Meynard watching. Now, why did he have the keys in his pocket?"

"Evidently to lock her in," said the old Doctor.

Judge MacCauley took the handkerchief from his pocket, examined it, then handed it to John. "Is that your father's handkerchief?"

John lifted it to his nose, returned it mechanically to the Judge. "Yes."

"How do you know? It has no initials, no mark."

"I know the perfume he used."

"Couldn't some other use the same perfume?"

"No. Some formula of his mother's. Sanchez makes it for us. Louis and I don't use it, but father——" He choked and left the sentence unfinished.

CHAPTER XXVI

"THIS IS OUR AFFAIR!"

MY body was heavy, as if paralyzed by the horror of it all; yet my mind was strangely clear. That perfume made by Sanchez for Henri Meynard . . . some formula of his mother's . . . and used by the man who had stolen up to our rooms to see Odollee—while Henri Meynard was supposed to be shut within his room below stairs . . . evidently the same man who had given that note to Sanchez for Odollee, commanding her to come to him just as she was about to make some revelation to—his sons.

Odollee had not, for all his violence, been afraid of him. She had been afraid *for* him. "Only a tiger's cub and horribly afraid." Surely she had not known what was going to happen. And yet—"If only it wasn't so dreadful," she had said.

The Judge was giving John the papers he's taken from Henri Meynard when a moaning and the sound of running feet came from the hall. The portieres parted and Sanchez appeared between them. For one moment she stood staring at the dead man, then with a loud cry in her own savage tongue she disappeared and I heard her moaning

and muttering as she ran down the hall and up the stairs.

The men had taken no notice of her. I was sitting on the floor with Odollee. John made a motion to put the papers in his pocket, but the Judge stopped him.

"Better look at them."

He opened them mechanically, glanced briefly at several; then came to a sharp pause. He read one through, taking some time, though it consisted of but one sheet of yellow copy paper. He took some time over another written on white paper; then put them in his pocket.

"Nothing of importance," he said.

But John Meynard could not look one in the eye and lie.

"You should send for your local physician," suggested Doctor Blackman.

"Why?" asked John dully.

The Doctor looked surprised. "It's necessary to have a certificate."

"Not here."

"It's necessary now," said the Judge sternly.

"Besides," the doctor added, "that young lady needs attention. I don't practice medicine and am not prepared to take care of her."

John rang the bell and Sing Lu came in, smiling. He glanced casually at his late master, bowing when John told him to fetch Doctor Fisher, and went out smiling.

The Judge addressed me. "You'd better try to get your friend to her room, Miss Tarver."

"Oh, please, Judge," I pleaded, "let us stay here. I'm afraid to go up there. Let us stay till the Doctor comes to look after Odollee."

"Very well. Doctor, you must help me take down these books."

"What for?" demanded Louis.

"To see if there's an opening concealed behind them."

John came over and, picking up Odollee, laid her on a couch, where she continued to whimper, breaking out now and then in sobs—repeating the words spoken to John at the locked door. And words spoken to someone else—before that, probably.

I took a seat beside the portieres.

Every book was taken from those shelves and put back, shelf by shelf. Every piece of furniture was moved and carefully replaced. Every picture was lifted; every rug was taken up—but no opening was found.

The Judge finally, in desperation, asked me to search Odollee for extra keys. A silly thing, I thought, since it was clear Henri Meynard wouldn't have sat still while she let somebody murder him.

Louis, who had walked with Odollee to the library door before the tragedy, told the Judge that as they reached the door before he had knocked, she had turned suddenly to him, giving him both her hands, saying: "Louis, I'm afraid." He had assured her she had nothing to fear; that his father was kind at heart and most courteous when calm, as he clearly was now. She had only to leave the door open and call if she wanted him and John.

They stood together a minute talking, he holding both her hands; then he had knocked. He had heard the key turn in the door; when opened, his father had stood between the parted portieres, and said: "If I want you, Louis, I'll let you know. I want to see this young lady alone."

His father had appeared quite calm and had asked her in, courteously closing the door. Louis had then heard the lock turn and the removal of the key. He had stood there a second, but hearing no protest from Odollee, rejoined us in the drawing-room.

SING LU, who was a sort of hall boy, was recalled. He said Odollee

had not come out after Louis had left her at the door. This information was, it seemed to me, obviously unnecessary, since Louis had heard his father lock the door.

John was carefully replacing a wall table, the backs of both old men being momentarily turned from him. He took a quick step toward Louis. Attracted by the movement, I turned in time to see his hand being withdrawn from Louis' pocket.

The action had been so amazingly swift that my eyes had not been equally swift to catch the beginning of the action. Louis looked startled, his hand going into his pocket almost as John's was withdrawn. And very shortly he left the room, returning after a brief absence.

There was no exchange of glances between the brothers. Louis walked over to his father's chair and stood leaning over the back of it, his face buried in his hands.

"Miss Meynard will have to be kept under guard, and you, too, Miss Tarver," said the Judge.

"Me! What have I to do with all this!"

"That's what we'll have to find out."

"You're crazy!" I cried. "And in a minute more I'll be crazy."

"There's no need of such measures," said Louis harshly. "This is our affair, and we mean that there shall be no scandal of investigation."

He said "we," though John and he had held no conversation.

The Judge pointed out that it was the state's affair as well, and as such, must be investigated.

They were still arguing the question when Doctor Fisher, a wizened little old man, came in, spoke to the brothers and made a bustling examination.

"Probably slipped, fell back in his chair and broke his neck," he said.

When the Judge pooh-poohed such an idea, the little man grew angry.

"No man the size of Henri Meynard would sit calmly in a chair and let someone walk up to him and break his neck. Strange accidents happen every day. People break their necks in bathtubs, or falling off porches a foot from the ground."

"A man's face is not distorted by a broken neck!" said the Judge sharply. "He shows positive signs of strangulation in the process of breaking his neck."

The little doctor went into explanations full of technical terms in which I caught "coagulation."

I was wondering how it was possible for Henri Meynard to be murdered in a room locked on the inside, all keys in his own pocket, windows locked and unopenable from the outside, also from the inside so far as Odollee was concerned.

What had she feared so greatly as she was about to enter that room? For nothing less than overwhelming fear could have broken her to the point of expressing it to Louis Meynard. Hers had not been the timidity of a woman about to face an ogre of a man.

For Odollee, like Henri Meynard, was not a physical coward; her will, like his, was a giant's. Yet she had grasped at Louis' hands outside that locked door, crying "I'm afraid."

What meant that continued repetition—"No. No. You wouldn't do that . . . you fiend!"

What had John put in Louis' pocket. Why Louis' haughty decision, after his return, to have no investigation? Were they trying to shield someone? Someone who had murdered their father. It seemed unreasonable, yet more reasonable than that they would carry their aversion for publicity to such extremes.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE TOWER LIGHT

EVEN now that ten years have elapsed since that night of of horror, it is with difficulty that I can catalog its events in orderly fashion.

Looking back, it seems but a space of minutes between the finding of Henri Meynard's body in the library and the inexplicable mystery of the tower light.

The rain which had threatened in the morning arrived shortly after Doctor Fisher left. Arrived in slews, coming straight down in a roaring torrent with no wind behind it. It was as if the sky were an inverted bucket of water, pouring its contents upon the island in one unremitting stream.

Henri Meynard was lying in state in the gloomy drawing-room, a priest beside him, mumbling prayers. The mirrors of the room were covered. The house servants stood in huddled groups terrified, but unweeping. John and Louis stood together, heads bowed on the mantel, John's arm around Louis.

Sanchez knelt beside the bier. And as if there had not been enough mystery in this house, she was sobbing bitterly, crying aloud in a wild savage tongue, eyes of hate uplifted as if to berate some higher power for this tragedy. Again the old eyes would soften, the voice grow pleading and she would cry aloud to "Maria . . . Maria . . . "

I thought she was calling on the Virgin, until she suddenly lapsed into her broken English. . . . "Ma leetle Maria. . . . Ma Baba Maria, Ah no tek ker you leetle baba lack Ah tole you. Ah fo'get. Ah hate you baba fo' dass what he do. Ah fo'get. Mebbe so you fo'get fo' heem too w'en you see heem bad. Me bad too. Me lie fo' heem. He ma baba too. Heem an' leetle Pierre ma own chile what you geev to me an' say Sanchez tak keer ma two baba. Ah—"

She began pleading in a tongue which I recognized as Spanish, still crying to Maria.

John went to her, and laying his hand gently on her shoulder, said: "Mammy, don't."

It was the first time I had heard him address her as "Mammy."

She looked up furiously. "Go 'way," she screamed. "Go 'way. You bad boy. Dass ma leetle baba. Ma leetle Henri what sleep on dass breas'." She began pounding her old flat breast with her fists. "Heem an' leetle Pierre bof sleep on dass breas'. Me Ah don' ker. Ma leetle Maria she leave heem bof fo' me."

John knelt down beside her. "Mammy, we need you, too," he said, slipping an arm around her.

She paused, her body grew rigid. Then she folded him in her arms. Instantly Louis came and dropped on his knees beside the two. She gathered him in her embrace, holding both as if they were little boys, crooning over them, crying out intermittently to Maria.

Presently John disengaged himself from her arms, looked at his watch and stood up. "It's midnight. The tower light must go out." He addressed the servants generally. A moan of terror broke from them.

"Me go," said Sing Lu, smiling. No shock could erase that bland smile.

"Thank you, Sing Lu. It's now five minutes to twelve. At exactly twelve put out the light."

"Yesee." He shuffled out. And the silence was broken only by the mumbling of the priest and the crooning voice of the old Negress, who still held Louis in her arms, apparently calmed thereby.

Odollee was asleep upstairs. Doctor Fisher had given her an opiate. He said he thought her condition was temporary and that she would be all right after a night's sleep. I did not fancy this vigil with the dead; but I was afraid to go to bed. Afraid to stay in any room in the house alone.

Tom Higenbothem had gone with Doctor Fisher, after being assured he could be of no assistance.

The Judge and Doctor Blackman had retired soon after Henri Meynard's body was removed from the library.

Sing Lu returned to the drawing-room. "Me make light go," he announced smilingly.

So for one hour neighboring ships must ride the seas in darkness and the seamen would know by that sign that the Head of the House of Meynard was dead, and say a prayer for the departed soul.

It seemed to me that the sailors needed the light worse on a night like this than Henri Meynard needed their prayers. But then, I am not fettered by old customs—nor by religion.

At a low-spoken word from John, the priest turned to the huddled servants and made the sign of the cross over them. They all dropped to their knees and the priest chanted the prayers for the dead. I felt foolish and out of place in my turquoise taffeta. John and Louis were still in dinner clothes.

It was a curious scene. That long drawing-room which, overlooking the gloom in the front grounds, ran back more than half the depth of the hall from which it was entered by two doors, one near the front, the other at the foot of the grand stairway, this last door guarded by an armored knight. The ceilings were high and there were two large fireplaces and a door at the far end, leading to the den where I had this afternoon seen the nun's back.

In spite of the quantity and massiveness of the room's furnishings it appeared destitute and bare. And in the dim light, with the kneeling servants, the chanting voice of the priest, the moans of old Sanchez, and the furious downpour of rain outside, it seemed to me to embody that purgatory in which some religious people believe lost souls serve time in gloom unspeakable, mourning for past sins and pleading with a stern God to forgive.

EVERY head was humbly bowed, eyes closed, hands clasped, lips moving, except mine—and Sing Lu's. He had knelt obediently, but his head was unbowed. And he was smiling. Calm, inscrutable, his smile seemed to mock the devotions. A smile that might mean nothing, but which suddenly seemed to me pregnant with sinister meaning.

His gleaming black eyes caught mine and one of the small yellow hands came out of its cloistering satin sleeve. He made an almost imperceptible gesture toward the front of the long room. Following his eyes and gesture, I was surprised to see a gleam of water. How was it possible to penetrate that Stygian darkness?

Then I knew. The tower light was burning. Built so as to cast its rays far out to sea, the big lantern was glassed across the front near its base, so that its light descended here into the front grounds. A path of light led into the jungle which guarded the house to the sea—so designed for the convenience of its lords when this entrance was used by its seaman masters.

Looking up at a slight sound from Sing Lu, who again pointed to the light, John rose and went to him. They held a whispered conversation

and Sing Lu went out. John returned to his prayers and presently the grounds were dark.

As Sing Lu entered the room the light flashed out again. John saw it and with an angry look at Sing Lu, rose softly and left the room.

Again darkness.

And again—as John entered the room—light.

I saw him turn, surprised, eyes first on the front windows, then on the servants. He seemed to study them as if to make sure they were all there.

Once more he returned to the tower and extinguished the light, only to see it flare out across the darkness upon his return.

He stood still, an expression of amazement and confusion in his fine eyes. Again he studied the servants as if he might have overlooked one. Presently he motioned to Sing Lu and they went out together.

After a while John returned alone, the light having gone out. I knew he had left Sing Lu in the tower to watch.

But it appeared that no guard could hinder that light. Louis, more absorbed, became aware of the disturbance as John and I rose sharply. He followed our eyes to the front windows, then went to John, who was gazing in bewilderment at the gleaming downpour outside.

The servants were all staring. They closed their eyes tightly, making the holy sign, their lips moving. Some of them prostrated themselves on the floor, praying aloud. The priest alone was undisturbed.

Louis and John were whispering together. There was a sound of flapping sandals on the stairs. Sing Lu entered. And if a Chinaman can be said to look excited, he did. He ran in, holding tightly to his wrists, smiling blandly, but dropped in a swift obeisance before the brothers, touching the floor repeatedly with his head, his form rising and falling.

"What is it, Sing Lu?" John asked in a loud voice.

"Ghos'!"

The priest continued at his prayers. The murmuring voices of the servants increased to a wail of rapid invocation. Sanchez got up and went to the brothers, who seemed not to know what to do. John made a sign to Sing Lu, still on the floor, to rise, and the four went out together with me on their heels. I was shaking from head to foot.

"Sing Lu, what's this nonsense?" demanded John when we were in the hall.

"Me lite lamp. Set down on bench loch. Voice say: 'Ling Lu, go bac you bissness. Liss bissness fo' dead man ancestl. No fo' you.' Len han come out of dalk. Lite go up. Me lun 'way."

"I'll go up and keep watch," said John.

Louis and Sanchez grasped his arm spasmodically.

"No, John. No. For God's sake leave it be," cried Louis.

"Dass house got one dead tonight," said Sanchez. "Dass 'nough."

"Yes, John. She's right. There's been enough tragedy in this house for one night. Whether ghost or man, there is some presence here that objects to the dark tower; objects perhaps," he hesitated—"to what it proclaims—that the head of our house is dead. Whatever that presence is, it is stronger than you are. And it is ruthless."

John was stubbornly determined. Sanchez threw her arms around him as if hoping thus to hold him back.

Finally Louis said: "For my sake, John."

John looked into his brother's pleading eyes a moment, then putting an arm around his shoulder,

turned with him back to the drawing-room. Louis could not dominate John's will as he had tried to do in the morning; could not drive him; but could pull him by the strings of a heart full of love for his weaker brother.

Sanchez entered ahead of them. I followed.

And now out of the night came a glorious burst of music. Wild, triumphant, dropping almost at once to a dirge of harrowing grief. There was a frightened drawing together of the servants. Louis cried out: "Why won't he spare us this one night!"

My theory, nay hope, that Louis was the author of this glorious music, abetted in its projection by Sanchez, was shattered.

The priest lifted his voice to a higher key, chanting more loudly, otherwise he took no notice of any interruption. The Negroes moaned pitifully.

Drawn by the strange telepathy which sometimes makes us suddenly look back, I turned to see Sing Lu standing where we had left him, looking after us with a broad smile. Not the bland smile that masked his yellow face on all occasions, but a smile that stretched his thin mouth in a long slit of malicious glee. His eyes glowed like oblong bits of ebony. No longer inscrutable, but a picture of devilish, sinister wisdom, and diabolical content. I could imagine him looking like that above the fallen body of an emeny, a dripping knife in his hand.

In a flash the bland mask was assumed. But even as I envisioned the hideous picture of him gloating over a fallen enemy, there came the thought that Sing Lu had hated Henri Meynard, and hated his sons. Why? The brothers certainly were considerate masters. Where had they got him? And had he a hand in this intolerable mystery?

Not for a minute did I believe the tale he had told. Frightened as I was by the events of this terrible day, drawn as my nerves were over that scene of despair and desolation in the drawing-room, and disturbed as I was over Odollee, I doubted that little yellow man's acknowledgment of fear even as he made it. No Chinaman would run from the spirit of the dead. Rather would he fall down and worship.

I started to question him, but thought better of it. As well quizz the Sphinx.

The hour of prayer dragged on—the tower light blazing throughout. For the first time in two centuries, perhaps, no seaman offered up a prayer for the departed soul of the Head of the House of Meynard.

And all the while that amazing, enthralling, terrifying music poured in upon us. It rose and rose, in blast on blast of triumph. Not joyous and triumph but cruel, defiant, withal unbelievably brilliant.

At the end of the long prayer, the servants rose with eyes rolling toward the front windows, hesitating, as if not daring to leave the room. Then, they took a frightened departure, keeping close together.

Sanchez followed them.

Only the priest, the two young men and I were left to watch beside that big-sheeted form at whose head and feet candles flickered.

And true to form, I fell asleep—that uncanny music singing its savage song of furious yet strange agonized triumph.

(To be concluded.)

Ways of the Dragon Gods

The Legend of the Cover Design

A BIRD and a fish at play? Although it looks this way on the cover, the bird is no bird; the eel is no fish; and they are not playing. They are deciding the fate of an empire.

Vast hordes of the enemy were approaching. The Emperor of Japan trembled on his throne, his wise men shivering at his feet. Soon he must disclose his terrible secret to the people and not only lose his empire to the enemy, but be an outcast from his own race forever.

He had been found unworthy by the Dragon Gods and they had taken from him the Sacred Sword, which was given by the Gods to protect the land.

The vast hordes were drawing closer. Without the Sword the Emperor was helpless. Nothing but the Sword could save the empire. It must be recovered.

Nearer came the enemy. More violently trembled the Emperor, the huddled wise men shivering closer. All sacrifices and offerings to the God of War had failed. Despair descended upon them.

Nearer and nearer pressed the foe. Despair turned to desperation and out of desperation sprang hope. The God of War would not listen —they would turn to their God of Peace.

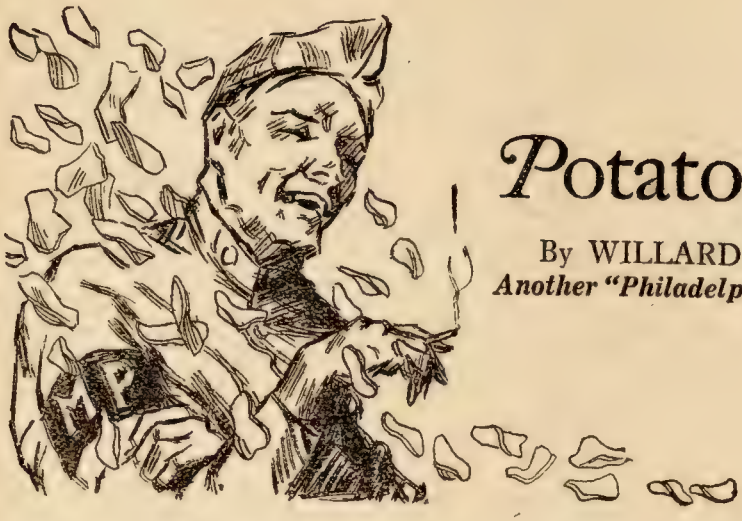
And now the enemy was at the gates. A great white bird was flying out to sea, where an enormous fish rose to meet him. The bird was the Dragon God of Peace in the form of a heron; the fish was the Dragon God of War, guardian of the Sword, in the form of an eel.

The God of Peace seeking a sword from the God of War!

While the Gods counseled, the enemy formed in battle array.

They struck—then fled. The great white heron had returned with the Sword. The God of Peace had answered.

FRED. T. EVERETT.



Potato Chips

By WILLARD K. SMITH

Another "Philadelphia Smith" Story

A WARM spring day dawned and prospered for once on the fog beset coast of Brittany. The morning fog had fled before the sun in precipitant retreat—its front line of mists, weary of prolonged winter combat, suddenly giving way to a blue and sparkling sky.

The sunlight, seemingly intensified after weeks of gray, bleak dawns, shone down on the barracks and encampments of the eighty thousand soldiers of the American Expitionary Force quartered in and around the French city of Brest, and brought the men crawling from their damp blankets with the feeling that life could be endured for a while longer.

Sergeant Philadelphia Smith, of the 18th Machine Gun Company attached to the Third Division, United States Regulars, felt the warm air loosening his stiff joints and, like the proverbial young man, turned his spring fancy to thoughts of love and gaiety.

He had obtained a pass for that day which permitted him to leave the knee-deep mud of the Pont-a-Nezon barracks, three miles from town, to sojourn amid the dour pleasures that the city of Brest offered the American doughboy. Not much, it was true, but the town was a veritable Paris compared to the discomforts and hardships of the camp, where his company and regiment lay awaiting orders to move into a larger and more active sphere.

It was unusually good luck, Philadelphia thought, that such a day of glorious warmth, sunshine and good feeling should have arrived concurrently with his pass.

"I wouldn't sell these here papers," he said to his companions, encamped in pup tents on the muddy hillside of the barracks, "for one million frog francs net cash and no discount."

He waved his pass. "I'm goin' in to the metropolis and look over their wild women, shows and saloons. And every M. P. that tries to stop me, I'm goin' to wave these papers in his snoot and say, 'Cheerio, you stinkin' flat-foot. How'd you

like to take a long, runnin' jump to hell and back?' "

"Yeah," commented a machine gunner, "you'll do a lot of jawin' to them babies. You'll be sayin' 'Yes, sir,' and 'no, ma'am,' at salute if you are stopped. A machine-gun sergeant don't rank more'n a Heinie prisoner with them blasted M. P.'s. I saw one stop a colonel and tell him he was out of order."

"Just a lot of hooey." Smith airily waved the comment aside. "Machine gunners, and 'specially sergeant machine gunners, is the real fightin' strength of the army. We rank everythin' and everybody."

"The heck we do," argued a corporal. "The Engineers is supposed to be the rankin' troops. Then the Ordnance."

"The Ordnance?" came an amazed comment. "The ordnance don't rank nothin'; even K. P.'s. You're crazy from bein' out in this sun. Call a pill roller and get yourself looked at.

"Well, I can't stand here arguin' with you bozos when the key of the city is waitin' me down in the vilvage."

Smith looked over his uniform for the tenth time, adjusted a button, changed the slant of his overseas' cap, wiped a bit of mud from his leggins and left them, to pursue his happy way townward.

"The luck o' that guy, gettin' a pass for a day like this. And I had one yesterday in the rain. All I did was sit in some lousy Frog café and listen to some leathernecks shoot off about what they was goin' to do to the Jerries," commented the third sergeant.

PHILADELPHIA picked his way carefully to company headquarters and reported as going to town. The Lieutenant suggested that he change the angle of his cap to a more horizontal position and dismissed him with an admonition to keep out of trouble if he wanted to keep his stripes.

Smith replied that he intended to do no more than look at the Carnegie Library and buy some soda water, and then left hurriedly, before the Lieutenant could make up his mind whether or not to feel aggrieved at such carefree speech addressed to a commissioned officer.

The paths that led from the various troop encampments were in terrible condition—duckboards were as unknown as featherbeds in the camp—and, despite Philadelphia's best efforts, he got into mud almost to his knees.

"A lot of use it was cleanin' up these dogs and leggins," he remarked ruefully, looking at his feet. And thus began a series of commonplace, small incidents that so often take the gloss off happiness.

Reaching the main road, he waited hopefully for a truck bound for Brest that might save him the effort of a three-mile walk, effort that could be expended in more pleasurable pursuits.

He looked at the blue sky and thought of what he might be doing in the States on such a day, had not the affairs of the nation carried him to France.

"Coney Island 'd be the ticket. Me and Mag gettin' off work early, hoppin' the subway and seein' the sights. Might be warm enough for a dip in the ocean. Mag's got some figure in a bathin' suit," he said to himself and deliberately let his imagination run on in the pleasurable thoughts of himself and Mag together.

Trucks there were in plenty, but all were returning from Brest in order to get their drivers back to noon

chow. Some were bringing back German prisoners who had been working on various labor jobs.

Philadelphia mused upon the job of truck driver and decided that there were much worse jobs in the army. He hated walking and a truck seemed to offer a chance to get off his feet. The job of being a prisoner didn't look so bad, either.

Slowly he made his way down the road, turning occasionally, hoping to see a truck. Sighting one behind him, he got over to the side and signaled to it as it came by.

"Gimme a hitch into town?" he called.

The driver placidly kept on.

"Use yer feet. Hitchin' ain't allowed," he replied.

Philadelphia cursed him heartily and resentfully continued his way.

Another truck came down the road behind him. He stepped out of the way and stood expectant. It rumbled closer, but the back flap behind the driver's seat hid its load.

Three soldiers were in front—no chance there. Philadelphia waved his hand. A derisive snort of the exhaust whistle answered him and, without slowing down, the truck passed—twenty-five German prisoners standing in the body.

And to add further insult, the truck wheels bounced off a high spot in the road into a puddle and very nicely sprayed Philadelphia with that mucilaginous mud that made France famous. Crowning that, the Germans all smiled in what seemed to Philadelphia the most disdainful manner.

"Them lousy swine," he cursed, "givin' me—a machine-gun sergeant—the merry ha-ha! This is a hell of a war! Jerry prisoners ridin' to work in limousines while we guys what's winnin' the war has to walk and git plastered with mud from their wheels.

HE TRUDGED along, not deigning to solicit further lifts, and giving every truck wide berth. Already his holiday spirit had suffered a decided letdown.

A short half-mile from the main part of the town, where the road turned at a tiny café, he heard the rumble of a truck and as it came up a voice called:

"Want a ride, soldier?"

Without turning, he snarled back, "See them stripes, ya half-wit!" He thrust out his arm as the truck came abreast. "Maybe ya'll know a sergeant the next time."

The driver, fully aware of his more strategic position and resenting such an uncalled for declaration of an affable attempt to help a trudging traveler, gave his wheel a slight turn and swung the truck a foot or two closer to Philadelphia, making him jump quickly aside.

"What you a sergeant of? Horse Marines?" The truck passed with this sally and Philadelphia, finding a stone too late, hurled it in impotent rage at the receding tailboard.

He covered the remaining distance in a vile humor. All his thoughts for a gorgeous holiday were forgotten in fruitless plans to secure revenge on the world in general. The sun still shone, but not for him.

He passed down Rue de Paris and turned into Rue de Siam, the principal street, unmindful of officers, M. P.'s or cafés. He was brought up short, however, by the peremptory demand of an M. P. corporal for his pass.

Without comment he showed his legal right to be present and, put-

ting it back in his pocket, debated the idea of tearing it up and throwing it in the corporal's face. Second thought decided for him that this would be foolish, and he continued his way.

The Café de la Marine suddenly confronted his consciousness and he turned mechanically into its interior and, noisily pulling out a chair from a table, surlily ordered a cognac.

"Cognac! *Il est defendu de servir de cognac aux militaires Americaines.*"

"What?"

The waiter repeated his statement still more regretfully.

"What's the idea? Can't I have any cognac?"

"*C'est defendu.*"

"Said a what?" asked Philadelphia," angrily repeating the waiter's French in strictly western English. The garçon, realizing the futility of speech, gestured the fact that cognac was prohibited for soldiers.

"All right, I got yar the first time," replied Smith. "I suppose ya'd serve it to them Jerry prisoners, though. This is some war. Can't git a man's drink, and me goin' up the front to get shot at, so you Frogs can make yer fortunes servin' white and red belly wash at whisky prices. Gimme some vin rouge then, and make it vite, too."

He looked about as the garçon disappeared toward the kitchen. The room was full of Americans, more or less hilarious. Snatches of maudlin conversation came to his ears.

"'Gold fish,' says I, 'gold fish again for chow. Well, ya kin take them fish,' says I, 'an'——'"

"Fourteen stinkin' days we was comin' over and subs bobbin' up every twenty minutes. Four of 'em at once when I was lookout. I yells down to the Admiral——"

"'Girlie,' I says to the Froggie, 'listen, I ain't no U. S. mint, but——'"

PHILADELPHIA was uninterested. His eyes caught a touch of color and he saw a girl seated between two sailors, both with their arms around her. A sergeant of infantry at the next table was angling for her attention and getting it. The girl was a fair-haired Breton type and somewhat resembled Maggie in Philadelphia's estimation.

"What is Maggie doin'," he thought. "Goin' out to Coney probably with some yellow-blooded slacker, while I'm here fightin' for my country. Maybe she'll be out with a sailor. She always had a fancy for the navy. Rather a slacker than a sailor," he decided, and let his fancy roam back to the days when he and Maggie spent three evenings a week together.

The waiter returned with the wine, and its stimulating tang cheered Philadelphia to romance.

By the time he had consumed his fourth glass, topped by two samples of cognac procured by an extra franc tip, he was out of the dumps and had decided to seek new fields of adventure.

He saw the French girl abandon the sailors and leave with the sergeant. This put him in still better humor. "Sailors were dirty slobs, having girls in every port," he decided, "and she did right."

The thought of Maggie was still uppermost in his mind and he wondered if he should not write a letter to her. Debating this, he passed a newspaper and curio shop where post-cards were displayed, and here he saw a solution.

With much careful choosing and scratching out of messages he even-

tually succeeded in getting one postcard out of four successfully written, and dropped it, stamped, into a box provided for that purpose. He little suspected that shop-keepers were not unaware of the possibilities of throwing the cards into water to soak the stamps off for resales.

Thoughts of Maggie became cumulative, and he looked about for a present to send her. This brought a realization of cost and, counting his money, he decided that eight francs were hardly enough to warrant such a token of his affection.

He passed on to the street and crossed to the Place de Champs de Bataille, where he sought a bench in the sun to decide the next step in his tour of holiday making. Near by was a little wooden booth, housing a hidden gendarme, who basked comfortably in the spring warmth.

Smith looked down at his leggins casually noted some lumps of mud. He took his knife and cleaned the spots off, and then came the idea of cutting his and Maggie's initials on the bench.

He tested its surface but found its paint encrusted wood too hard for easy cutting. His eyes sought another background for hearts entwined and the smooth surface of the little booth seemed ideal. The initials would stand out very nicely, he figured, just below some French jargon reading, *"Defense D'afficher."*

Philadelphia set to work with a keen blade and a romantic heart. Inside the gendarme dozed fitfully. As the masterpiece gem of wood-cutter's art developed on the back of the guard-box, he woke up, conscious of an unusual noise. He looked behind his bench, apparently seeking a rat.

Then he listened and looked out the door. The square lay flooded with sunshine, but gave no hint of what was causing the noise. He got up and put his head out of the door, but finding no clue, he walked around the house.

At his first turn he stopped in the utmost consternation at the spectacle of an American soldier deliberately carving two hearts and four initials on the side of a police booth of the great Republic of France. And to make such irreverence for the nation's property even more insulting, the carving lay but four inches beneath the notice warning all and sundry against desecration of the wall.

PHILADELPHIA, intent on his work, did not note the gendarme's approach, and this unconscious indifference added even more to the police officer's indignation. Recovering his breath and speech, he burst forth:

"Qu'est ce que vous faites la, imbecile?"

Philadelphia turned causally and noted the belligerent attitude of his critic. He sensed that his artistry was not getting its just praise.

"What's it to ya?" he demanded, knife in hand.

The guard knew no English, but Smith's indifference added fuel to his indignant fire. He stepped up and grasped Philadelphia by the shoulder and pointed dramatically to the notice.

"Regardez! Regardez! Mille tonner de Dieu!"

Smith looked and slowly spelled out the warning:

"Dee - fenc - er dafitch - er. Well, what of it? I'm carvin' somethin' here you ought to be proud of. That's for my girl, see. *Amour! Amour!* See." He pointed to the hearts.

He shook himself loose from the gendarme's restraining hand and turned to finish the last of Maggie's initials.

"Non! Non! C'est defense."

The gendarme grabbed his arm again and pulled him away.

"Look here, you Frog Napoleon. I'm goin' to finish that there initial if I have to poke your block clear through this house. See them chevrons. Run along 'fore I get sore."

He flung the gendarme off and turned to his task.

The policeman, however, considered Philadelphia Smith, not a Sergeant of the 36th Machine Gun Company, 3rd Division, but just another crazy American soldier upon whom strong arm methods were necessary.

He, accordingly, grasped the hilt of his short sword and advanced. Philadelphia turned to meet him as the sword came half-way out of the scabbard, and planted a neat blow on the gendarme's chin. The latter went down in a sitting position with a grunt of pain and surprise.

Simultaneously Philadelphia decided that perhaps it would be wise to escape temporarily from the neighborhood and leave completion of his carving to a more propitious time.

He held gendarmes in the utmost disdain, but in view of the proximity of the American military police, it seemed foolish to continue the row. He turned, as the Frenchman struggled to his feet, but saw immediately behind two more gendarmes advancing toward him. One was a sergeant, from the galons on his sleeve.

Philadelphia thereupon made an unfortunate error. One, two or even three French cops meant nothing to him. The French as soldiers he held in some esteem. As policemen he considered them a joke. And in that he erred.

Brest, a roistering seaport town, had for many years a hard-boiled gendarme force, used to handling the rowdy, drunken sailors of many nations, and the two officers who had Smith on the flank were the equals of any Irish cops on Avenue A.

He ran toward them, intending to add two more victims to his day's conquests. They separated as he came up and, neatly dodging his fists, closed in. Before Philadelphia had a chance to attempt another blow, they had him pinioned between them. He twisted and fought and the three men plunged about on the walk.

The first gendarme, purple with rage, joined the struggling group and between them Philadelphia was completely subdued. They dragged him back to the police booth where, amid much gesticulation and argument, the enormity of his crime was pointed out to the gendarme sergeant.

"Ya'd think I'd pasted up a pitcher of the Kaiser," commented Philadelphia to one of his captors. "That's nothin' to git so het up about. Come on," he jerked his arm, "I got to be goin'. I got a date tonight."

The police pointed to the cut boards and talked French fast and excitedly to Philadelphia.

"Spill in English, buddie," he remonstrated. "I ain't had no parlor education in parlez-vousin. Sure I cut it, but I was hasty maybe in takin' a crack at your fat friend there."

Apologies seemed to be in order in view of the odds against him and Philadelphia was willing to be quite reasonable, but his soft

speeches turned away no wrath and, with a concerted tug, they started to walk him off, ordering:

"Allons, au Commissariat de Police."

There was no mistaking the serious purpose of his captors and Smith guessed that he was to be haled before some tribunal, either French or American. Nothing was less to be desired by a Sergeant on afternoon's leave. With a mighty effort he broke loose and ran.

Across the square went the pursuit, with Philadelphia twenty feet in advance, into the Rue Saint Yves, past the Prefecture Maritime, around the corner through a cross-street to Rue de Siam, with French civilians stopping, agape at the unusual spectacle, and doughboys cheering their comrade.

At the corner Philadelphia ventured a look back and then ran straight into a full squad of American military police in charge of a Lieutenant. They gathered him into their arms and waited for an explanation from the French police. It came gasping, but voluble. The Lieutenant, who understood, looked at Philadelphia as he replied to the French outburst.

"Uh-huh. Uh-huh. *Oui, je comprends.* Uh-huh."

Each assent sounded more and more ominous to Philadelphia's ears. He knew not what list of crimes was being charged against him and his attempt at explanation was peremptorily squelched by the Lieutenant.

"Come on, you," the latter ordered. "Put some nippers on him, Corporal, and detail a couple of men to take him to headquarters. There's been too much of this rioting going on."

The squad passed on with the Lieutenant explaining to the gendarmes just what would happen to the culprit, and Philadelphia, escorted by two Americans, marched toward the guardhouse.

"Tough luck, buddie," said one of the guards, "runnin' into us that way. Did you really kill one of the Frog cops?"

"I don't know how many of 'em was dead," replied Philadelphia. "They was three of 'em layin' cold on the walk when they finally got me to beat it."

"How come you got in a row with the Frog cops?" asked the other of his guards.

"Over a dame."

"A Frenchie?"

"Yeah, that Frog sergeant's wife. I don't like husbands."

The guard whistled.

"Cripes, you got nerve, pickin' the frau of a gendarme sergeant."

Philadelphia twisted his arm.

"See them stripes? That's me! Philadelphia Smith, of the 36th Machine Gun Company."

"Well, you may be a tough baby, but I'll betcha the Liberty Loan against three brass centimes ya ainta goin' to be no sergeant very long," was the rejoinder.

A WEEK later an old entry was crossed off in the 36th Machine Gun Company's records and a new one made. It read, "M. J. Smith, private," and on the arms of Smith's blouse were several threads and unfaded shadows, showing where chevrons had been.

"You was lucky you didn't get jugged fer a year," said a corporal to him. "Gettin' in rows with these grand army Frenchies is worse than first degree murder. You must 'a' had some pull to get off with just loosin' your stripes."

"Well, I heard that the General

himself wrote a letter about me to the President of France, but I'll get even with them Frog-eatin' Jerries some day. Me, who knows more about machine guns than the guy that made 'em, bein' just a private! But I'll get even with them Frogs."

"Yeah, that's tough," was the derisive answer. "Too bad you wasn't made a looey. You'll be havin' a lot of fun doin' guard duty now, 'stead of gettin' your twelve hours sleep a day. Why don't you desert to the Jerries, then you can fight the Frenchies."

This suggestion was almost fulfilled. A call came on Sunday morning for guards to accompany groups of German prisoners, who were being taken down to the wharves to unload supplies.

Smith's name, like the Arab of poetry, led all the rest, despite the fact that machine gun soldiers were seldom taken for such duty, and he was officially attached as the guard of a very motley collection of twenty-four German P. W.'s.

"Lookit Philadelphia's new platoon!" called a K. P. "Make 'em do squads right lyin' down. And he's carryin' a rifle and bayonet."

"What's your rank now, Iron Cross Philly?" called the new sergeant who had taken his place.

Smith spat derisively and called to his prisoners.

"Come on, you stinkin' huns, git along." He handled his rifle and bayonet menacingly. "You've a hard-boiled boss now."

A sergeant-major of infantry gave him charge of his prisoners, with directions as to guarding them.

"You got twenty-four Jerries here to chaperone down to the docks and back, see. They's a truck waitin' for you. And if you lose one of 'em, you'll take his place, see, wearin' a P. W. uniform and doin' a real day's work every day till this war's over."

"Say," replied Philadelphia with heat, "who you talkin' to? See them stripes—" Then he recollected that he was no longer among the elite. The sergeant-major looked at him with amazement.

"What stripes, you big flatfoot?"

"Oh, nothin'," replied Philadelphia. "I just forgot."

"Say, if you're tryin' to kid me, you've got the wrong bozo. On yer way, soldier, and don't lose any of them Heinies."

Philadelphia grasped the unfamiliar rifle which had been given him, and menaced the prisoners with the bayonet.

"Come on, you Hindenburgs. *Allez!* And the first one of ya that looks cross-eyed gets this sticker in his liver."

The prisoners, accustomed to constant change of guards, gave him little heed, their attention being focused on the commands of one of their own non-commissioned officers, whom they obeyed implicitly.

He, under the tolerance of the Americans, was really in charge. A sharp command from him and they marched, German style, to the truck and clambered aboard. Smith scrambled after them, not a little embarrassed at having two of them help him on the truck. One even offered to hold his rifle while he clambered on.

"Well," he said to himself, as the truck started, "this is a hell of a fine job for a machine gun sergeant, playin' nurse to a lot of husky Jerries that don't even know I'm guardin' 'em."

The truck snorted down the very road that Philadelphia had taken so blithely ten days before. He smiled wryly at the remembrance of its landmarks and made further vows

of revenge against the Gendarmerie of the Republic. However, passing the trudging figures of less fortunate soldiers, making their way toward Brest, his mood changed a bit as he railed them in passing.

"Walk, you flatfeet, walk! Serves ya right for joinin' the infantry. Come on, be a P. W. and ride to work. Cheer the Kaiser, join the Jerries and see the world!"

THE TRUCK arrived at Brest, passed through the city and took the wide causeway down to the docks. A traffic officer stopped the driver and gave him instructions as to his destination.

"Take yer rubber-neck wagon down to C Dock. They're unloadin' potatoes."

There the prisoners scrambled out and formed into line. A quartermaster sergeant came up to the German non-commissioned officer and, pointing to a huge pile of barreled potatoes twelve feet high, gave him instructions in German to repack them in bags holding about a third of a barrel. Smith stood conspicuously about waiting for a chance to catch some prisoner trying to break away, but his presence seemed entirely unnecessary. The German sergeant directed his men efficiently and they were soon all at work.

Philadelphia, keeping an eagle eye on his charges, strolled about cursing the fate that had made him such an unimportant figure. Absently he began to count his prisoners.

Then he started and counted again. His face took on an air of concern as he made a third count. There could be no mistake. He had twenty-five of them.

Here was a dilemma. He could fathom the possibilities of having less than his quota, but one more was not covered by any instructions, nor had the penalty for additions been pointed out. He frankly hated to have to report back this surplus to the Sergeant-Major. As he considered the problem the Quartermaster Sergeant came by.

Philadelphia called to him.

"Say, Serg, give me some dope. I had twenty-four of these Jerries, according to some Sergeant-Major's count, when I left camp with 'em, but now I've got twenty-five. What will I do about that?"

The Sergeant had his own troubles and wasted no time on Smith.

"Shoot one of 'em," he replied tersely and went on.

"Say, you—" began Philadelphia, but remembering his new role of private, stopped and scratched his head.

There was nothing to be done, he decided, and finding that the Germans went about their work like any group of ten dollar a day free laborers, he looked about for something to distract his mind from the onerous fate that had befallen him.

He examined the potatoes, remembering early days when he had spent some time on a farm. One particularly big tuber attracted his attention and he weighed it casually in his hand. Then, by way of passing the time, he tossed it in the air and endeavored to catch it on the tip of his bayonet.

"Not bad sticker practice," he remarked to himself and went around the other side of the pile of barrels, where, with greater privacy, he could attain better proficiency.

However, ten minutes of this proved galling and he strolled around to look at his charges. They were still busy and he thought to make another count. He proceeded

casually and then finished his computation in consternation.

Quickly he recounted and found that his score had been correct—there were now twenty-three German prisoners under his charge. Visions of himself bearing the hated letters P. W. on the back of his blouse came to his mind and he brought his rifle up to charge and ordered the prisoners to attention. They gathered confusedly together and looked at him curiously.

"Where's them other two guys gone to?" he demanded of the German sergeant. "Come on, cough 'em up, or I'll give ya the end of this bayonet!"

The sergeant, with an air of being bored by such a foolish gesture on the part of the guard, answered brokenly:

"Two haf for bags gegangen."

Philadelphia looked in the direction of the dock and saw his two absent charges returning laden with bags. He glanced at the German non-com and detected a faint smile.

"Listen, you big Hun," he ordered. "You come to me first when any of this gang wants to go visitin'. Who do ya think ya are? I'm in charge here."

This denunciation, he hoped, would settle the question of his superiority, but whether the German did not understand, or regarded Smith as not even ornamental, much less than useful, he gave no acknowledgement and put his men back to work. In his eyes it was absurd to place a guard over prisoners who considered release from the paternal protection and good food of the American Army as an extreme misfortune.

PHILADELPHIA felt something of the disdain with which he was regarded and resentment surged in his breast. He cast about for a means of revenge, looking hopelessly about the broad street which served the docks.

It was Sunday morning, and only necessary work was being done. A bright uniform caught his eye, moving along the far sidewalk a hundred feet away. The figure and face looked familiar and he recognized it as the gendarme sergeant who had bested him. The figure turned abruptly and went in through a doorway. From the opposite direction came another gendarme and he likewise turned in.

"Must be a raid or something," he mused, and studied the entrance. It seemed somewhat different from the other doorways of stores and warehouses lining the street. A flag was flying above it and he noticed its general official appearance. A sign over the door proclaimed it—*Poste au Police.*

"That must be a precinct house or somethin' like that," he remarked to himself, and simultaneously an idea came to him. He measured the distance with his eye. It seemed short enough to a good sand-lot short stop such as he had been. He looked around.

The street was practically deserted about him. A hundred yards or so beyond, some trucks moved in and out and on the dock there was a little activity. However, there seemed little chance of his being detected in his fulsome plan of revenge on both his prisoners and the forces of the French law.

Selecting a nice, round potato, somewhat smaller than a baseball, he stepped around in back of the barrels where he would be unseen. He rested his rifle and, drawing back his arm, threw the tuber. With amazing accuracy it passed through an open window of the police station.

Philadelphia then picked up his rifle and stepped out in full view, nonchalantly doing his guard duty, but keeping his eyes cocked at the police station. Singularly, nothing developed. He strolled back behind the barrels and tried again, aiming at another window.

The potato crashed off the sill and bounded inside. Almost instantly a gendarme's hat and face appeared. Smith, peeping around, reached behind him for another missile. As the gendarme drew back out of sight he threw it at the door.

Simultaneously it opened and the sergeant appeared. The potato struck him full in the stomach and he sat heavily back through the door, causing another behind him to stumble over his body.

Philadelphia threw once again, too quickly, perhaps, for the missile missed the door by six inches and spattered down on the gendarmes. He did not wait for further action. He picked up his rifle, and sat down with his back to the pile of barrels out of sight of police and Germans. Nonchalantly, he began whistling, "There'll be a Hot Time in the Old Town Tonight," presenting a picture of the most naïve innocence. His prisoners on the other side had seen nothing of the bombardment and worked heartily, unaware of the impending tragedy.

In a few seconds he heard the sound of running feet and a German exclamation or two, as the prisoners looked around. Then came a torrent of French and the sound of blows.

He hazarded a glimpse around the barrels. Three gendarmes had arrived like a whirlwind on the flank of the Germans and, with furious outbursts of French epithets, had knocked several of them down before the prisoners had a chance to meet the attack.

The police had assumed, as Philadelphia intended, that the Germans had thrown the potatoes—a misunderstanding that looked like it would settle Philadelphia's score all around.

The Germans, as prisoners of the American Army and under its protection from French insults, resented this unwarranted, inexplicable attack by three crazy French policemen. They reasoned they had a right to protect themselves and immediately set upon the three gendarmes in clumsy but effective fashion.

THE FIGHT waged merrily. Drawn by the uproar, a dozen American soldiers, working at various points near by, ran over, but Smith stepped out into the open and waved them aside.

"My Jerries is havin' a little set-to with some Frog cops what just run over and started to beat them up. Let 'em alone a minute."

The Americans were content. It was a spectacle that appealed hugely. Gendarmes were decidedly unpopular and the Germans, too, had won no popular acclaim. The American audience decided to remain neutral.

The Frenchmen stood together while the prisoners were all in each other's way. Only a few, closest to the gendarmes, could get in any blows. Philadelphia and his companions cheered both sides.

"Go after 'em, you Jerries! Wallop that slob of a sergeant!"

"Beat 'em back, Frenchies! They started this now and you can finish it!"

The prisoners' flush of battle rage began to expend itself as reason asserted itself in their minds. Their sergeant knew the severe penalties that would be exacted should a gen-

darme be killed, and he endeavored to call his men off.

However, a dozen or more hot-blooded fighters refused to stop and rushed the gendarmes again, carrying them down in a struggling tangle of bodies.

Philadelphia, too, began to see that his inactivity might have serious consequences should anything fatal happen. After all, he was in charge of them, and unless he acted, he figured, he would have difficulty proving that he had followed out his duty. He, accordingly, decided that the fight had gone far enough.

"Hold this gun of mine," he called to a soldier next to him, and jumped into the fray with his fists. He fought his way through to the Frenchmen.

The sergeant was flat on the ground, while his two companions were half on their feet resisting desperately. A powerful German pulled back his foot to kick the sergeant in the head when occasion offered. Philadelphia caught him square on the chin and he fell back in a heap.

He pounded another hard in the ribs and rapidly cleared the space around the gendarmes. The prisoners fell back and the fight was over.

Philadelphia was not unscathed. He had a bloody nose and a bruised cheek, while his blouse buttons had been ripped off, but he was in excellent humor for he had a splendid audience.

"Cut out this row, you big Swede. Lay off the Frogs, or this angel of peace'll smack some more of ya."

He then addressed the sergeant, pulling him by the arm:

"Come on, get up! This little war's over. What do ya mean by runnin' over here and startin' a row with my prisoners?"

The gendarme got on his feet painfully. He had rendered a good account of himself, but he was well battered. He understood none of Smith's criticism, only knowing him as a brave rescuer.

He grasped Philadelphia by the shoulder, crying with sincerity:

"Mon ami! Mon ami! Mon brave!"

Looking into Philadelphia's face, he then recognized him as his antagonist of the week before. To his more volatile mind this recognition came as coals of fire heaped upon his conscience. He pulled Smith over to him, kissed him on both cheeks and broke into a torrent of French apologies.

Philadelphia stood flabbergasted.

He turned to the group crowding around him.

"What's this guy kiddin' me about?" he asked.

A nearby soldier, who understood French, informed him.

"He's givin' you a lot of bull about savin' his life and sayin' he's sorry he beat you up or somethin' the other day."

Smith turned a scornful face to the sergeant.

"You sayin' you beat *me* up? Why, you poor fish, it took eight of you to hold one arm!"

The Frenchman misunderstood. He thought perhaps that Smith was refusing to accept his apology and he reiterated his thanks and appreciation.

The interpreter continued:

"He says for you to come over to the office with him. He's goin' to recommend ya for the iron cross or somethin'."

This news seemed to Philadelphia to have possibilities.

"Tell him I got to watch these Heinies to keep 'em from goin' up and tearin' the City Hall apart, but

anything he wants to do to get me back my stripes will be O. K. with yours truly."

The gendarmes received this news with gratification and then, turning to the prisoners, he told them in pointed French just what they could expect for upsetting the dignity of the Brest police force, of which he was an important member.

"You shall hear from me, too, my brave rescuer," he added to Philadelphia, as he turned with his companions to go back to headquarters to write a ten-page report on the deplorable incidents of the day.

Philadelphia turned to his prisoners.

"Well, a good time's been had by all. Now git busy on them potatoes before I start a war."

FOUR DAYS later Philadelphia was summoned just after Retreat to his regiment's headquarters. He was ushered into the presence of his Colonel, who stood with two solemn dignitaries of the city of Brest and the Major commanding the gendarmes.

"I have received, Private Smith," said the Colonel, "a most commendable account of your action in rescuing a sergeant of the Brest Police Department from a brutal attack by a number of German prisoners.

"These gentlemen of the Municipal Government have called to thank you, and have suggested that you be suitably honored. In consideration of the circumstances of your being present on the docks as a guard rather than a machine gun sergeant, I feel that your recent demotion was perhaps an act of Providence, enabling us to have had you on the job preventing a most serious affair. I shall see that you are reinstated in your former rank."

Philadelphia gulped at this ponderous speech, and knowing not quite what to do, saluted. The Colonel continued:

"These worthy gentlemen have suggested that, so far as lies in their power, they would like to reward you. Have you any suggestions about that?"

Philadelphia considered.

"Well, sir, you might ask 'em if I can go back and finish carvin' Maggie's initials on that dog-house up in the park.?'

The Pond

By MARJORIE BOWEN

SHE looked down at the tawny water, folding her thin hands tightly in her thin lap. The ruddy light of the early morning of autumn cast a soft golden hue over her ungracious figure, as she sat on the low stone parapet that edged the pond.

The beech trees of the old park closed in the horizon about her; the sunlight fell between the trunks in patches of rich light on the thick, damp spread of golden leaves.

Leaves lay also on the surface of the untroubled water of the pond, vivid on the darkness, and broken here and there in their brilliant decay by the living brightness of some small green plant.

The woman sat quite still. Her small head with the twist of pale hair was not ungraceful, her poise had something of the charm of breed and elegance, but she was dry and fleshless, and her face was such as would inspire fear in little helpless things that might be in her power.

The features were small, with the colorless upper lip drawn too sharply back from teeth too white and dry. The chin was feeble in line, the eyes were light and expressed a certain cautious desperation, an intelligent bitterness, that the hesitant lines of the face denied. With her lids down she seemed a very stupid woman, but her unveiled glance was not in the least stupid.

For the rest, she was utterly without charm as she seemed utterly without pretension. The harsh lines of the gray taffeta bodice made no attempt to hide the curveless lines of neck and shoulders; the tight sleeves made no disguise for thin arms and hands with ugly knuckles and wrist bones.

She wore a handsome brooch of pearls on her flat bosom and a quantity of tortoise-shell combs on her flaccid blonde hair. And she had the air of one belonging to a sheltered and privileged class; the hard, reserved expression of a woman to whom nothing had ever happened and who had never stepped outside the limits of the narrowest of circles.

Her age might have been anything between forty and fifty, but she had had so little to lose that the passing of her youth made but small differ-

ence to her complete unattractiveness.

SHE WAS thinking so intently that she did not notice a beautiful collie dog that came running through the beech wood, until he was pushing his fine muzzle into her slack hands.

"Good dog," she said, with mechanical patronage.

He flattered her idea that she was immensely his superior by humbly lifting his beautiful paw to her lap, at which she pushed him away with a cold annoyance that he was too noble to resent.

He lay down near the parapet of the pond, his long coat half gleaming white, half chestnut color, shining in the strengthening sun.

Caroline Mordaunt was roused from her deep reflections.

She glanced spitefully at the dog.

"Humphrey's animals are so ill-trained," she said to herself, and flicked away a portion of beech mast which the dog's caress had left on her neat gown.

"Go away!" she cried aloud. The joyous unconcern of the animal vexed her extremely.

He beat his tail on the ground and eyed her with compassion.

Caroline rose.

"Disobedient," she said.

Her attitude was threatening; the collie generously ignored her ill-temper and continued to wag his tail, then sprang up with triumphant pleasure as his master came toward the pond.

Brother and sister stood facing each other, for she had advanced to meet him as soon as she was aware of his approach.

"You are out early, Carrie," said Mr. Mordaunt coldly.

"I may suppose," she replied, "that I am at least mistress of my own movements."

Their antagonism was marked. His was disdainful, hers was bitter. In both it was more than passing ill-humor, in both it showed now, under the habitual control of their race and breeding, as something akin to hate.

"The park is large enough," added Caroline. "We need not cross each other's way."

"No," he said.

Yet neither moved.

He turned to caress his dog as if considering what to say, and she stood erect, waiting, hoping to receive from his words fuel for the fire of jealousy and rage that absorbed her soul. He, too, was angry; he knew that they must speak and he was not afraid of her, but with the habit of his training he paused to choose his speech.

He was fully fifteen years younger than she, the only child of his father's second marriage, as she was the only child of the first, and he had none of the ill looks that she had inherited from an invalid mother.

His fair features were a little fine in line, his expression slightly cold and his manner slightly hard and distant. But he was handsome, beyond question, and had nothing of the provincial in his dress and manners.

Caroline tightened her lips as she looked at him. His dark gold hair, the authoritative lines of his profile, the fair cheek, the arched nose, the curved lip, as he bent over his dog, reminded her of his mother, the second Mrs. Mordaunt.

She had loathed the interloper, the fine town lady. Her own mother had been of a better family; Caroline never forgot this.

"Why are you waiting?" she asked.

She enjoyed his hesitancy; she knew that he wished to keep his temper and she knew she could make him lose it, yet keep within the bounds of her own control.

He straightened himself to look at her. He was a charming figure in his brown cloth riding-suit, against the gold of the beech trees and the gold of the sunshine. She hated him the more for this, and noted with pleasure that he was pale with vexation.

"I was wondering," he said deliberately, "how best I might inform you, Caroline, that I cannot endure this temper of yours."

"And what is the result of this wonderment?" she asked quietly.

Mordaunt frowned. He had no wish to engage in the usual play by which his sister delighted to confuse and enrage him. So he came coldly to the point.

"You might go to town for a while, to Aunt Delia."

"Why?"

"Because you so obviously find Mordaunt Court intolerable," he replied.

"That is not true. It is my home. I could never be happy elsewhere."

"It is also Hetty's home," said Mr. Mordaunt firmly.

Caroline drew a quick breath.

"And I am to make way for Hetty?" she asked. "Are you so entirely befooled and bemused as to turn me out of your house at the command of a parson's daughter?"

He steadied himself by looking down at the affectionate face of his dog.

"In my house my wife commands," he said. "For five years you have made her home insufferable to her. In a thousand ways. In those ways that only women understand. I am not aware of all you have done, but Hetty is. She has been very unhappy—but she has not complained——"

"Oh, no," interrupted the sister, "she just cried; it is more effective."

"Caroline, I am speaking very quietly. I must beg you to control your tongue. You have a cruel tongue. I want to speak very quietly. You had better go to London. Hetty is quite—ill after last night. I cannot see her suffer so. You—you humiliate her before the servants, before the child—you are very hard, Caroline."

She was pleased to see that he was breathing deeply; she was sure that neither he nor Hetty had slept after the scene of last night.

"So this is my sentence of banishment?" she said. "Well, like father, like son. All to the winds for the first piece of pink and white, a shopkeeper's daughter—the daughter of a hedgerow parson. It needs but Harry to grow up and pick his wife from the boards of Drury Lane, and the Mordaunts will be finished indeed."

AT THIS insult to his mother and wife, Humphrey Mordaunt winced. Truth gave the words a sharp edge, for his mother had been the daughter of a city merchant who carried no arms, and his own marriage was frankly a *mésalliance*. Hetty was scarcely of gentle blood, and had brought him nothing but goodness and beauty.

Caroline could boast sixteen quarterings on the maternal side.

"I am glad," she said, stabbing his silence, "that you are ashamed of these two light women."

The young man flushed darkly.

"I am ashamed to be your kin!" he cried.

She smiled grimly to see him roused.

"You are fit," she answered, "to be the husband of that wicked little fool."

Mr. Mordaunt turned aside; he remembered Hetty's anxious words before he left the house: "Don't be unkind with her, don't be harsh. I am only sorry for her, after all."

Yes, Hetty might be sorry, Hetty, who had never been angry with any one in her short life, but he was not. The irritation was too long standing, the anger too deep-seated, the resentment too profound.

He considered Hetty's compassion for Caroline as part of Hetty's lovable but almost foolish softness, but perhaps it was because Hetty saw more clearly than he into the bitter heart of her sister-in-law.

"You will go to London," he said. He thrust the toe of his boot into the beech mast and did not look at Caroline. "If you care to leave your affairs in my hands I will administer them."

He said this without intention of offence, for it did not occur to him to wound her by reference to her dependency, and she knew it, but she was stung the same as if he had spoken with meaning to insult.

It was another grudge she had against the memory of the father whom she felt had failed her when he had left her to the mercy of her brother.

"I will not go to London," she said.

"You will not stay in Mordaunt Court," he returned.

"Why should you refuse to go to London? There are all your mother's people; they can give you a more diverting life and a better chance of a suitable marriage."

She looked at him with a certain dignity.

"You may spare that," she answered. "I am forty-five and plain and sickly; you know that I have no chance of marriage—and never have had."

"It has not been my fault," returned Mr. Mordaunt, exasperated and thinking of his own desperate efforts to find a match for his sister. "You have had your life in your own hands. No one stood in your way."

He glanced up at her, and the intent look of her small eyes made him vaguely uneasy. She was hateful and yet she was pitiful. Suddenly he felt that, and remembered Hetty's plea for mercy. Yet he was hardened by the recollection of Hetty's swollen eyes, disfigured face and hysterical sobs as she writhed under the memory of the other woman's tongue.

"You will be happier in London," he said, as if justifying himself. "I will make all suitable provision for you."

"My home is Mordaunt Court," she replied. "And you know it."

"It is also Hetty's home," he returned. "Till I married you were mistress of the place. When I married I—we—wished you to stay, but ——" He made a gesture with his fair hands; it was hopeless to try and express in words the utter disaster of the five years that had passed since he had brought Hetty to his house.

And yesterday things had reached a climax. Hetty had lost her control. She had broken down before the servants—had become ill. He shuddered at the hatefulness of the whole thing; at all costs it must be stopped.

The sunlight passed the beech boughs, fell full on her meagre figure and woke a little glitter in the faint blonde of her hair.

"So, because your wife is hysterical," she said, "I am turned out of the house. Did I raise my voice last night or make a scene?"

"You insulted Hetty on her birthday, poor child." His voice changed, for he was very much in love with Hetty. "And you frightened Harry and ——"

She interrupted.

"The brat is spoilt."

"I will not have him frightened. Last night was not the first time. You seem to dislike him."

"I do dislike him. He is a hateful child; I have never pretended to think otherwise. Hetty has spoilt him."

He looked at her with an astonishment ingenuous enough; his man's mind could not grasp the motive of her bitterness.

"How you hate Hetty!" he exclaimed.

She raised her shoulders; she did not trouble to reply. She felt a certain triumph in his startled perception of her feelings.

Mordaunt glanced away from her down the beautiful vista of golden trees. The collie, restless at the long pause in his walk, was nosing round the moss-splashed silver trunks.

"I must return," he remarked briefly. "You will be ready to depart in two or three days, Caroline?"

She was frightened into angry speech. Her woman's spite had so long taken advantage of his masculine forbearance that she had taken him as weak and his judgments as futile; but in her heart she knew that he was not weak.

"I will not go!" she cried. "I will not leave here! This is intolerable. It was you who insulted me last night." Her words came swiftly; her thin voice was roughened with rage. "You gave her the cinnamon diamonds. They were mine, they are mine——"

"They go to the wife of the head of the house," he defended himself wearily. For five years the Mordaunt diamonds had lain locked in the cellars out of deference to Caroline's jealousy, but in his mind they had always been Hetty's property.

"They were promised me by my mother," said the woman fiercely. "I wore them before you were married. They are mine. Part of my marriage portion."

"You have said your marriage is an unlikely event," he returned. "If you do marry you shall not lack jewels. But I will speak no more of this——"

But she was not to be silenced. The wrong and the offence over which she had brooded all night were fuel for the fire of a long rage and hate.

"You are such a fool," she flung at him. "Such a coward. You know the stones are mine, and therefore dare not give them to Hetty, but she cajoled you with her milkmaid coquetry."

"Stop!" he said roughly. "The diamonds have always been Hetty's—as they were my mother's, as they shall be for my son's wife. I showed them to Hetty on her wedding day, but she would not take them because you had worn them and she was fearful to offend; but you had no right to wear them.

"And you have no right to interfere in my life. And you have no right to insult Hetty and frighten the child. And, my God! you leave Mordaunt Court, if I have to call the servants to turn you out!"

HE CALLED the dog sharply and turned on his heel, his young heart hot within him. He felt that he had acted rightly in putting an end to the torture of five years, and considered himself completely justified. But the whole thing was hateful to him and he inwardly raged against circumstances.

The scene of last night stung in the memory. It had been horrible, rather vulgar to his thinking. Women, he reflected, even those who boasted a family of sixteen quarterings, so soon made things vulgar when they were angry.

Caroline had pushed Harry away

when he came to show her a thorn in his finger of which he was greatly proud, pushed him so that he had stumbled, and then, because he had touched her foot, she had seized him with ugly vehemence and slapped him again and again.

And Hetty—poor Hetty had lost control, too, and had been shrill and incoherent and flushed and desperate, and had dragged off the necklace and hurled it down among the wine glasses and fruit dishes. She had stumbled out of the room, clutching the sobbing child. Afterward she had made him promise to send Caroline away.

"I will not have Harry frightened," she had said between her gusts of dreadful weeping, and her red eyes had shone with a resolution that Mordaunt respected.

Yes, Caroline must go. Her cold fury of yesterday had been roused by the sight of the Mordaunt diamonds on Hetty's pretty neck. She had expressed herself in a quiet bitterness before which the young couple had been almost defenceless, ending in her attack on the child. This had been but the culmination of a long persecution, a deadly, silent warfare, an unsleeping animosity which had destroyed the peace of Mordaunt Court and poisoned the very air that Hetty breathed.

Mr. Mordaunt had spoken the truth when he had said that Hetty had been fearful to offend. She had been very young, very timid, very eager to propitiate the sister of the husband who she considered had vastly stooped in marrying her. For Hetty greatly undervalued her dowry of goodness and sweetness and beauty and health.

The young bride had been at the feet of the bitter spinster, and Miss Mordaunt had taken full advantage of the weakness of one whom she regarded as a stranger and an interloper. She continued to rule at Mordaunt Court as she had always ruled. She almost ignored Hetty, and the wife found herself continually thwarted, snubbed, even insulted by the sister who was Miss Mordaunt, while she remained only Hetty Mathews, who had married above her station.

MORDAUNT, as he strode back toward the house, recalled, in the light of his present resolution, the miseries past as a man suddenly freed might recall his prison.

It was astonishing, he reflected, how long they had endured such an intolerable state of things; astonishing how strong had been the custom and tradition and that false shell of sentiment that they had called family feeling; astonishing how they had supported the tryanny and selfishness of an embittered woman.

He blamed himself for not having ended things sooner. Yesterday's scene, and what he had wrung from the distracted Hetty afterward in the moment of her collapse, told him what his wife had suffered.

Up to yesterday she had been bravely silent. Never once had she complained to him, but he could recall her a thousand times as sad, distracted, confused—Hetty trying to disguise tears; Hetty desperately apologetic for some little household oversight; Hetty frightened because of an untidy lock of hair or a rent in her gown; Hetty trying to escape tiptoe into the garden——

And now he was sure that it had always been Caroline.

"She must go," he said aloud. "She shall go."

He felt he had been most unjust to Hetty. His sore heart was softened by an unutterable tenderness as he recalled her plea for his sister. She was compassionate even in her own distress.

As he reached the noble terraces that formed the approach to the house, a composed Hetty in a white gown came to meet him. Her poor face was carefully powdered, but showed swollen and distorted, for Hetty's tears had been very real.

Her husband kissed her hand.

"She is going, dear," he said rather unsteadily; "and you at last shall be mistress."

"I think it is best," answered Hetty in a low voice, "but we must be kind, for we have everything and she has nothing."

THE PHRASE made no particular impression on Mordaunt, but it expressed exactly the reflection of Caroline when her brother left her: "everything and nothing."

Nothing indeed now that she was to leave Mordaunt Court.

She returned slowly to the pond and again seated herself on the low stone edge. There was no other seat near, and her legs felt weak—emotion always made her conscious of her poor health. Her throat was dry and her head ached. She smoothed out the pleats of her skirt with shaking hands.

She had no doubt that her brother was in earnest; she saw that she must go.

London represented to her the dreariest of banishment; the relation with whom she would have to make her home was old, infirm and tiresome, and lived excluded from a society that no longer tolerated her acid peevishness.

She was now what Caroline would be in another thirty years.

Although Caroline Mordaunt had many relatives in the capital, she hadn't any friends or even acquaintances; and if she had not been able to attract there twenty years ago, it was not likely that she could now. Her mother's noble family, of whom she was so proud, had always civilly ignored one who was useless to them in every way.

To her London was a desert, broken only by the withered oasis of that house in Highgate, always darkened because Aunt Delia's sight was weak, and always silent because Aunt Delia disliked to be reminded of a world to which she was conscious of no longer belonging.

Mordaunt Court was her home. She really loved the place where she had been born, and which was associated with the timid joys of a sickly childhood and the secret, short dreams of a thwarted youth.

Here she was mistress. The servants feared her, the villagers respected her; she ruled them as Hetty never could, had never attempted to. Hetty's personality was not fitted for the position of Squire's lady, and Caroline Mordaunt enjoyed her kingdom.

Besides, she liked to watch her brother and his wife, to keep Hetty in her place, as she called it; to see that she did nothing inconsistent with the rank to which she was not born, nothing to lower the name she was not worthy to bear.

Her tyranny of Hetty had become the object of her life. She had made a fine art of it—and now she must go.

She pictured Mordaunt Court when she had left, with Hetty joyous, excited, free at last. . . . What foolish, undignified things she would do. Once she had said she wanted her rooms painted white with flower wreaths in the French fashion. Caroline's acid contempt had saved the beautiful Tudor oak, but now it would be sacrificed.

That, and a thousand similar things. Caroline shuddered; a desperate rebellion shook her, body and soul.

"Why am I like this?" she asked herself. "Why have I nothing? And she everything—even *my* home?"

She looked back over the years and saw herself always sickly, always plain, always disliked, always avoided; her sole weapons against a world that did not want her, her name and her tongue. She was Caroline Mordaunt, so people had to be civil.

She was bitter and unmerciful in her judgments and her comments, and therefore held her own through fear; but she had had nothing out of life—there had seemed to be a conspiracy to exclude her from everything.

As a child she had been too delicate to join the sports of her age. Her sole companion had been an ailing mother, who passed lonely days sighing over a tambour frame and lamenting the absence of the husband who diverted himself in town.

As a girl she had been kindly ignored by the mother of Humphrey. Her few visits to town had been conspicuous for their ill-success; she had always been glad to return to the place where she was at least a personage. Elsewhere she was nothing but an unattractive woman.

And then her father had died, and soon after, his wife. Humphrey had gone abroad with his tutor, and she had reigned in Mordaunt Court until the evil day when her brother had married Hetty Mathews.

CAROLINE set her thin lips. She knew she was face to face with the worst moment of her life, for it would be more terrible than her brother's marriage, this leaving of Mordaunt Court. The first had been like the mere signing of an act of abdication, but this was actual dethronement and banishment.

Her rage and jealousy amounted to a genuine agony; she could have thrown up her arms and shrieked aloud to the heavens in her despair.

But the habit of a lifetime kept her restrained.

She knew that there was one sure way by which she might revoke her doom. She could not move her brother, but she could move Hetty. She was quite sure that an appeal to Hetty would not be in vain; if she threw herself on Hetty's mercy, Hetty would induce Humphrey to let her remain.

But she would sooner leave than do that. At least, she would have the satisfaction of going proudly, with a sneer to the last. It would be impossible ever to think of conciliating Hetty.

How she hated this woman who had been born to poverty and insignificance, and who had gained wealth and rank, friends, a husband, a child—all that was pleasant, just because she was pretty and knew how to flatter a man.

Not even the shadow of love had crossed Caroline's life; she was not conscious that she had ever desired it. It had seemed always to belong to the world of her enemies, but she had noticed the strength and handsomeness of men, the happiness of lovers, the joy of mothers, with hate and jealousy.

Apart from the rivalry between them, she hated Hetty just because she was loved. She hated her for having a child. It had been a grim pleasure to spy on her and make her ashamed of the caresses of the husband who was still her lover.

Once Caroline discovered them under the apple trees in the autumn, and he had been kissing Hetty's throat with extraordinary gentleness, on his knees, while she reclined against the tree-trunk; within the circle of her arm had been her baby.

Caroline had felt curiously sick

and weak, although she had had the satisfaction of seeing Hetty's confusion. But now they would be free of the torture of her company—she writhed to think how happy they would be in their freedom——

The sun had now risen above the beech trees and was full over the pond and the still figure of the woman.

The wet dead leaves shone on the stagnant surface of the water, where five-legged insects plied to and fro. The few broken and withered reeds glistened like ruddy spears and the fresh green of the flags showed verdant above the decay.

A tiny plant with succulent foliage and minute white flowers rested lightly on the dark, undisturbed bosom of the pond, which the sunlight could not pierce, but could touch only to murky, tawny gold.

"They will come here and sail paper boats with the boy," thought Caroline dully.

She shivered. Last night she had not slept, that morning she had not eaten. She wanted to return to the house, but her strength did not seem equal to the effort of leaving her place, though her bones were aching from the strain of her position on the hard stone coping.

"I think I am ill," she said to herself. She wondered what would happen if she were taken ill. She would have to stay and Hetty would nurse her and be kind.

But she was not going to be ill; she did not want Hetty's kindness. She rose with a certain dignity and turned in the direction of the house, but she was really weak and walked with difficulty.

The golden trees against the hazy blue, the silver autumn trunks, the fox-colored carpet of leaves, the pungent damp smell of autumn—all this she must leave. As she came within sight of the house, she stopped short in her pain.

She really loved the place.

And now it would be filled by the friends of Hetty, all the creatures that hitherto she had managed to keep at bay; there might even be new servants, there would certainly be new ways.

SHE BECAME conscious that she was walking quite unsteadily, and rested against one of the last of the beech trees.

Across the lawn and into the wood a little child came running. Caroline looked at him dully. He had his mother's dusky hair, his mother's dark eyes, his mother's frank ways. To Caroline, her brother's child never seemed a Mordaunt.

She turned her head to watch him as he trotted through the trees. She remembered what a pleasure it had been to slap him last night and to see Hetty's impotent rage and the spectacle she had made before the servants, tearing off the diamonds with a force that must have broken the clasp.

The diamonds—Caroline trembled to think of them. White and fine they were, set clear with an orange light in the cleft of each, and fastened together by links of gold so fine that they clung close to the neck and flashed loose with every movement. And this for Hetty—

They were hers, *hers;* she was a Mordaunt.

She continued to watch the child.

He had a miniature kite, which would not float in the still air; he dragged it contentedly over the beech mast.

It was attached to a long thread of rose-colored silk.

Caroline suddenly ran after him, and overtook him before he was aware of her.

"Where did you get that silk?" she asked.

He was four years of age, and he was frightened, but he put himself into the attitude of a man as he answered:

"Mamma gave it me, ma'am," he replied.

"You lie," said Caroline. "You took it from my work-basket. I told you never to touch my things. You are a wicked boy."

"Harry's mother gave it to Harry," repeated the child, standing his ground bravely; but his little chest was heaving and his lip trembling as he faced his aunt.

"No, she did not," answered Caroline; "or if she did she took it from me—there is no color like that among her things. It is mine and I want it. I have no other of that shade. Give it me."

"It is mine and I shall keep it," said the child.

His defiant face and the gesture with which he put his hands behind his back, concealing his treasure, roused the woman into a very luxury of rage.

"You have been taught to be rude to me, you naughty, naughty boy!" she cried.

She put out her thin hand to seize the silk; he remembered her slaps of the night before and his courage melted into panic. He turned to run back into the house, but she stepped in front of him, and he dodged and ran away through the trees.

Caroline ran after him; she no longer felt weak, but inspired by a terrible strength.

"I am going to punish you, do you hear?" she called after him.

He was sobbing with terror. Her spare figure hastening after him was endowed with all the horrors with which his imagination had peopled dark places and long silences, all the dreads that lurked, he somehow knew, in the distant reaches of the world beyond his home.

He kept on running.

She was gaining on him steadily. It was a long time since she had run. The movement went to her head like wine flies to the head of one unused to it; she felt all her pent passions rising, rising, making her crazy.

The child reached the pond. The parapet had been built on purpose to protect him from the water; he dropped against it, panting, crying.

The woman was on him, exultant.

He scrambled up in blind fright and climbed the parapet; Caroline's hands were on him.

"You naughty boy," she kept saying, "you naughty boy!"

His little face was livid; in his supreme moment he recalled his father's teaching, the maxims of a race whose admired virture was courage.

"I shouldn't have run away," he sobbed, "only 'cos you're so much bigger than me."

She was shaking him to and fro; the lust of power heated her, the lust of destruction excited her. His softness, his struggles, his cries inflamed all the passions so long repressed—all her hatred, all her bitterness spent itself on the child.

He slipped out of her hands into the water. She leant over eagerly and held him down, chattering like a mad woman.

She saw the great circles the dark water made, the disturbed trails of the little green plant with the white flowers—the bubbles.

"You naughty, naughty boy!" she said. "I will give you a lesson."

He so soon ceased to writhe in her grasp that she nearly let go of him, he was so heavy.

She was feeling suddenly tired. With an effort she dragged him up; he fell back once or twice, but at

last she got him up over the parapet.

His face was covered with thick green slime, the dead leaves clung in the little crisps of wet hair. In one hand was tightly clutched the paper kite and the skein of rose silk; she noticed it was stained and spoilt.

She touched him curiously. It was strange that anything could die so easily. She tried to prop him up in a sitting position, to lift him to his feet.

She thought of all the dead things she had seen, birds and rabbits, and tried to remember what they looked like; he couldn't be dead, he was quite warm.

"You may keep the silk," she tried to say, but she couldn't command her voice, "if you are a good boy," she quavered.

He slipped out of her wet hands onto the beech mast; her fingers strayed foolishly over his befouled face.

Like a thread of brilliant light striking into darkness one word penetrated her dazed brain—*murder*.

She shrieked at the top of her voice; she snatched up the child and stumbled toward the house. Now she scarcely felt his weight.

"Help! Help!" she cried. "Harry has fallen into the pond! Help!"

She had no thought but to get assistance; she was wild with dread and terror.

Her brother and Hetty crossed the lawn; they were already looking for the child when they heard her cries.

They came running toward her, and she thrust her burden into her brother's arms.

"I dragged him out," she said, "but it was too late."

She had no thought of excusing herself, she did not know what they said or did. They seemed two figures of fantasy, thin and unreal beside the intensity of her own action.

SHE WENT into the house and up to her room. As she passed the open door of the sitting-room she noticed that the skein of rose-colored silk was still lying in its place among the neat order of her open work-basket.

"I never knew that Hetty had any of the same shade," she said to herself.

When she reached her chamber she was so tired that she almost crawled to the chair at the foot of the bed, which was the first resting place that offered.

"If I had had a child of my own," she reflected, "and become used to carrying it, I should not have found him so heavy."

Her precise gown was damp and soiled on the bosom, the skirt stained with drippings, the sleeves soaking to the shoulders, for she had plunged her arms into the water to drag up the child.

"I wonder what Humphrey will do," she thought.

A long time went by and the house was silent.

No one came near her; she sat quite still, gathering her strength.

She had no thought whatever of escaping her fate. Like an animal securely trapped she awaited the hand that sooner or later would come to destroy her. The big gallows on the London road suddenly became of interest to her—but Humphrey would never deliver her to that fate. She was of his blood—yet——

Perhaps he would kill her himself. She could imagine that, with Hetty looking on, Hetty who would be different now without a child.

Perhaps they would tell her to destroy herself; it could so easily be done, with any handkerchief——

Or the pond——

That was easy also. She had but to lean over, as she had leaned that

morning, and hold her head a little lower and plunge her face beneath the slime and water plants.

"I don't think that he suffered much," she reflected. "If they give me a choice I will choose the pond."

She passed her tongue over her lips and tried to rise, but her limbs were strangely stiff.

Why should I not go to the pond without waiting for their orders?" she thought.

The sun was now setting and casting red rays into the well-ordered chamber that she had slept in all her life.

The day was nearly over and no one had come near her.

"They have forgotten me," thought Caroline. "I had better go before they remember."

She rose and looked at herself in the glass that had reflected her face every day for so many years.

Her expression was quite composed and stern; she rearranged the thin, limp locks of blonde hair that hung disordered on her thin temples, and she glanced with disgust at her ruined gown.

"But it is not worth while to change it."

WITH an unsteady step she went toward the door. She was giddy from lack of food, and wondered if she could creep into the dining-room and get a glass of wine before she left the house.

She had to pause a moment before she had strength to open the heavy door.

As she stepped onto the landing she saw her brother and his wife coming up the stairs. She noticed that they were hand in hand and that Hetty had a woolen shawl over her white gown.

Caroline backed into her room, licking her lips. As they entered she still moved away from them, slightly crouching, but facing them; when the wall stopped her retreat she leaned against it, glad of the support.

She was surprised to see them so calm; but Hetty's face looked as if it had been beaten, and Humphrey had an expression of utter exhaustion.

Caroline did not flinch.

"Hetty wished to speak to you," said Mordaunt in a voice distressingly hoarse. He had to clear his throat twice before he could continue. "I have brought her."

He said no more; he placed his shaking hands on Hetty's shoulders and gazed at her as if he implored her to speak.

Hetty was looking at her sister-in-law; she was no longer in the least pretty, Caroline noticed that.

"We are going away," she said quite gently and composedly, "but first I had to speak to you, of course. You see I am calm. I could not sit still today. I had to do something. We are going away. We could not live here now, could we?" She glanced at her husband, who was staring at her in speechless woe.

Caroline tightened her lips, and waited, as many of her house had waited, the descent of the enemy's sword.

The brave, anguished voice of Hetty continued:

"We are going abroad—for a long time. To be away from the pond. I wanted you to know this."

She came forward a little; her face was so disfigured as to be expressionless, battered by grief as from many blows. From the pocket of her gown she drew a long, polished wooden box.

Still Caroline waited, her shoulders raised, her eyes restless; waited her judgment.

Hetty suddenly came up to her and took her gaunt hand.

"Thank you for trying to save him.

God bless you for trying to save him," she said. "You never liked me, I know, and it was my fault, too. I am so foolish—I must have hurt you—many times—and you tried to save him—see, your dress is still wet—and you carried him to the house—you cried out as if you had been his mother. Thank you, thank you, and forgive me."

She pressed her swollen lips to the hard hand she held; Caroline looked swiftly to her brother.

"Forgive us that we did not come sooner," he said faintly. "You have been alone—but I—today I have not noticed the passing of the time. You—you—must change your dress, Caroline. I'm afraid you will be ill."

A dusky color came into Caroline's face; her chest fell with a long breath.

"I don't understand," she said.

"It was the paper boat," the unhappy father explained." He wanted to sail a paper boat, but Hetty gave him some silk to make a kite instead. And he seemed quite happy on the lawn—but he must have gone to the pond—with the idea of the boat. I always meant to make the parapet higher."

"He climbed," said Caroline; "it was all over in a moment."

She looked at Hetty, who still held her hand, and then she looked at the polished box in Hetty's other hand. She knew it contained the cinnamon diamonds.

And Hetty braced herself for the fulfilment of her task.

"We are so grateful," she said, "please believe that. I—I never understood you. I want you to take these. For yours always. Please."

She held out the box.

"Humphrey wishes it, too. Think of them as from—from—Harry."

Caroline's thin fingers closed over the box.

"And when we go away—it will be soon—as soon as——" She stopped. "You will be mistress here—we want that. Both of us. Last night I was unkind. We were going to send you away. And you were willing to give your life for Harry. The doctor said that you might easily have been drowned. Please kiss me. I can't say any more tonight."

Caroline stared at her.

"I don't want to be thanked," she said. "I think I will go to bed now. I am very tired."

The poor mother humbly kissed the hand which she believed had endeavored to rescue her baby; somehow she managed to strangle the sobs that were tearing her throat, for the parson's daughter had her courage also.

Mordaunt stood with bowed head.

"I will come and see you in the morning," he said. "I wish to leave everything in your charge."

His wife joined him and they left the room as they had come, hand in hand.

Caroline rang the bell; she felt hungry now and thought with pleasure of food. She glanced at her tea service on the little shelf in the corner. Yes, she would like a cup of tea—and she would change her dress and have a fire in her room.

But first of all she took out the diamonds and, hurrying to the glass, tried them on her throat.

It was good to see them there again—and Hetty was going away and she would be mistress once more.

"As soon as they are gone," she thought with intense satisfaction, "I will take down that hateful partition she put up in the buttery and put back the jam cupboard where it used to be."

The Will

By HOWARD M. BAIRD

"WELL, HAT, is the old man dead yet?"

With the question a sardonic grimace twisted Clint's heavy face. The woman who, at his clumping entrance into the kitchen, had been bending over the hot stove raised her torpid eyes to meet the pale blue ones of her husband.

"What makes you talk like that?" she said curtly. "I don't like that kind of talk." She turned to her cooking.

Chuckling throatily, the man dropped his lunch pail on a box, flung his greasy coat and cap on a nail and rolled up his shirt sleeves. Through closed teeth he whistled sibilantly as he lifted the teakettle from the stove, carried it to the wooden sink and poured some of the contents into a battered basin which he finished filling from the pump.

With a pasty bar of yellow soap that lay on the drain-board he began viciously to lather his grimy face and hands.

"Don't get sore, Hat," he called presently from his ablutions. "I ain't to blame. That's what grandpa said, didn't he? Goin' to kick out this week."

He poured out the dirty water, pumped some fresh and plunged his head into it. Rubbing his dripping hair with a coarse towel, he approached the stove.

"Where is he, Hat?"

"Out gatherin' some firewood. He ain't feelin' good, Clint. I'm worried about him."

Lifting the lid of an iron pot, she plunged a fork into the contents.

"Stew's done," she announced. "Sit down, Clint. Dad's had his snack. Didn't want much."

The man slumped into one of the

chairs at the table, with its yellow and cracked oilcloth spread. Hattie placed before him a steaming, brimming bowl, served herself to a smaller portion, poured the black coffee and, wiping her face with her apron, sank into a seat opposite her husband.

"HE WORRIES me some, too, Hat," said Clint, stirring the stew and blowing on it. "But it's that will of his that worries me most."

. . . The Squire there, where Hat was sitting; the old man at his elbow; himself and Hattie standing behind them—that scene of a fortnight ago was never far from Clint. And every word that the blunt pen of the Squire had scratched on the virgin sheet of paper before him had been branded deep on Clint's very soul.

"Talk as you please, Hat, it's a crime the way he's leavin' his money—cuttin' you out cold. If he'd just be leavin' you half, now, his sister would still get fifteen hundred. That's enough for an old woman with one foot in the grave. By rights, you ought to have it all—you're entitled to it.

"Look at the way you been takin' care of him these last six months. What's his sister done, I ask you?"

Clint put down his spoon and, leaning heavily on the oilcloth, leveled his pale eyes in an almost accusing stare at his wife.

"I'm tired about hearin' all that," the woman replied without animation. "I don't want his money. I told you a dozen times I don't.

"I was a orphan. He took me; he raised me. He's done a lot by me—more'n anyone else 'd do. He give me and you this house. He's done more than fair.

"His sister will enjoy that money. I ain't seen her half a dozen times, but she's a nice old lady. She used to give me candy. She's poor and all alone out west. She needs the money more than we do."

"Yes!"

The man's voice was vibrant with suppressed anger.

"Yes, she needs the money! How 'bout us, with gettin' our pay cut, huh? How 'bout us gettin' cut down to thirty-seven cents an' four days a week, huh?"

"What's the matter now, Clint?"

"The dirty hounds are goin' to do it," he went on, his fists clenching. "They're takin' the food out of our mouths. The last cut to forty-two cents was a rotten enough deal, but droppin' us five cents more an hour is too much. We ain't goin' to stand it. We're goin' to strike."

"I don't like strikes, Clint," the woman said, with greater force. Her voice was anxious.

"You're earnin' all you get; but strikes is awful. Mebbe this cut's all talk. Are you certain?"

"McGurk give it to me. He knows," retorted the big man.

He plunged his spoon into the stew and began to eat voraciously. The woman was silent.

UPON the depressing stillness came footfalls—shuffling, faltering. From the back porch an old man, bent, white, hollow of cheek, came into the house.

"Hello, Clint," he called feebly as he paused, wavering, in the middle of the room.

"Hattie, I'm goin' in to lay down a bit. Feel kinda tired. I got enough wood for tonight and mornin'; only I wisht you'd let the washin' go. You're not lookin' good. What do you think, Clint?"

The husband looked at his wife. He could detect no unusual alterations in the lines on the woman's face. Hat always appeared to be about tired out.

"Yes, I guess you're workin' too hard. Better put up the wash till to-morrow," he suggested, with a smile.

But it was not solicitousness for her that had bred the smile. An idea had suddenly taken root in Clint's brain. He wanted to humor the old man.

"I want to get it out," the woman replied. "It won't take much more'n an hour. I'll have it on the line afore dark falls. It's nice out."

"See, dad?" Clint, throwing up his hands, turned to the old man. "Can't do a thing with her . . . But how are you?"

"Don't feel so well as yesterday, thankee," quavered the wavering figure. "Purty tired. My time's drawin' nigh."

He shuffled to his bedroom door.

"Nothin' in that, dad," Clint called after him. "You're good for years yet. I'll come in and keep you company soon's I finish."

Hattie looked at her husband strangely, as the old man disappeared.

"Got to keep his spirits up," Clint explained in a gruff whisper. "Got to kid him along."

WITH fitful interchanges of makeshift conversation, man and wife went on eating. The meal finished, Hattie began to stack up the dishes.

Reaching to a stand behind him, Clint picked up a stubby pipe and package of tobacco that lay in a cardboard box. Thoughtfully he packed the pipe and, rising, crossed to the sink. Tearing a piece from the newspaper into which the woman had poured the coffee grounds, he twisted it into a spill, removed the stove lid and, having ignited the spill in the flames, held it over the bowl of his pipe.

"You didn't get no matches yet, Clint," his wife reminded with dogged perseverance. "I been askin' you to bring some two, three days now. It's awful unhandy."

"I don't see where all the matches go," he complained petulantly. "When matches are seven cents a box you got to be savin'. Seems so's every time we get a cut things go up." He flung the spill on the stove.

"I don't ask for nothin' I don't need, and I ain't wasteful," the woman retorted succinctly.

"Ah, don't get peeved, Hat," he responded, puffing the tobacco to a glow. "I'll get some to-morrow."

His voice sounded a conciliatory note. "Now I'm goin' in to chat with grandpa. It will take his mind off himself. S'pose you'll be in when the washin's done."

"Yes; got to give him his medicine. Be careful you don't tire him, Clint."

There was a tinge of sharpness in her voice.

"The doc' says jest let him do what he pleases and talk when he pleases."

"Don't worry about me none," replied the big man carelessly.

Hattie went with him to the bedroom door, to smile encouragingly at the old man, who lay on the bed, his head propped up by pillows. Then she returned to her work.

Having carried the dishes to the sink, she gathered up the newspaper of refuse and carried it outside to dispose of. Presently the sounds of her labors over the washtubs came to Clint's ears.

"WONDERFUL woman," he said to the old man.

His voice was low, disconsolate.

"She's a deservin' girl if there ever was one. I wisht I could do more by her. She's earnin' it. She ought to have a rest. She needs it. But what's a fellow goin' to do?

"McGurk tells me we're due for

another cut." And Clint told what he had learned that day; told it softly this time, without anger, without excoriations, without malice.

For it was a part of his scheme to talk gently, with forbearance. The old man did not like strikes; his gospel was the reward of long-suffering.

"So you see," Clint finished, "where it puts me, now. I can stand it, but there's Hattie. I planned to get her a new outfit; take her away somewhere for a good time, and you, too, grandpa, when you got to feelin' better. But with thirty-seven cents an hour, and work so uncertain, it can't be done."

"Well, son, no use to worry."

The old man's reply was little more than a whisper.

"Of course, I want to see you fare well, and Hattie. Times will change. You got this house. You got a roof over your head. Far's I'm concerned, don't worry about me. I'm not on this earth much longer."

"Pshaw, there's nothin' in that, grandpa. You're only seventy-eight. That's young. Your sister and you'd be just about right to do the Charleston." Clint smiled broadly. "How old is your sister, now?"

"Maria's eighty. I'd like to see Maria. I ain't heard from her since two months ago. She always did hate to ask anyone to write letters for her. I'd like to have her here; but I guess what she says is right —maybe the trip would end her. It's a long ways to Arizona."

The old man closed his eyes.

"She draws a pension," remarked Clint easily. "I guess she must be makin' out all right."

"That pension wouldn't keep her if she got right bad, if her tuber trouble let go," said the old man. "That's why I'm lettin' her have the money. She needs it. She'd never take a cent from me when I was livin'. Claimed I needed it. Said she had the pension. But when I'm gone she'll have to take it. Squire Beach'll make her take it."

The old man chuckled.

CLINT worked himself uneasily in his chair. The time was opportune for the practice of his scheme; the psychological moment was here. Yet he was afraid.

Afraid of what? Yes, of what? The old man couldn't see very well, anyway. In this fast-fading light he wouldn't be able to read a line.

Afraid of what? Who'd catch him? Perhaps the thing wouldn't work out all right. Perhaps the old man would suspect him.

But why should the old man suspect anything? He couldn't see; he wouldn't know. Afraid of the old man! Bosh!

He had tried to work on the sympathies of the old man. He had praised Hattie, had shown her want; he had told of his own extremities. But the subtly disguised pharisaical petition had failed utterly to move the old man, who was determined to leave his money to his sister.

Clint wanted that money. Three thousand dollars was a lot of money, more than he could save in ten years. Look at the interest he would get, putting it in the bank. Hundred and twenty dollars a year; more than that, counting compound interest. He'd have to figure that out.

But if he could find a good first mortgage. . . . That was the way to make money—a good first mortgage. Some loaners got a bonus, too.

Hadn't he been keeping the old man all this time? Hadn't he been footing the doctor bills? That cost something. And Hattie: look at

the way she'd been waiting on him hand and foot.

The old fool leaving all that money to his sister—she with a pension already, and one foot in the grave. Clint's eyes burned; his hands twitched. Nothing to be afraid of. He and Hattie had earned that money.

"NOW, grandpa," Clint spoke, "if you really are determined you're goin' to leave us, don't you think it would be kind of nice to send a note to Maria?"

The big man's voice had been unsteady at first, but composure had come to him as he proceeded.

"Well, I dunno," replied the old man slowly. "Hattie wrote her a week or so ago."

"Yes, but you know an old lady likes to get letters," Clint insisted persuasively. "You like to get letters."

"Yes; I'd enjoy hearin' from her."

"Let's write her, dad. Won't hurt nothin'. Mebbe she don't realize how bad off you are. Mebbe we'd better tell her. She might get shocked if you was to die sudden like—gettin' the news out of a clear sky. That's bad on the heart, too."

"Well, mebbe you are right, son."

The old man's voice was very tired now. His resistance was being sapped.

"I'll get pencil and paper," spoke Clint hastily.

Going to a table he pulled out a drawer. Within was a clutter of odds and ends. Clint pawed over the litter, and found a pencil; but there was no paper.

Where could he find some paper? He must find some paper. He dare not call Hattie for assistance. He might be seen and halted; questioned, or called by Hattie, if he left the room.

"Fetch the paper, son. I'm gettin' tired."

At the sound of the old man's voice globules of perspiration dotted Clint's forehead.

Was Hattie still washing? Yes, he could hear her. But she must be about finished; she must be about ready to hang out the clothes. She would soon be in to give the old man his medicine.

Ah, here was some paper on the floor; a large sheet of tablet writing paper. Someone had stepped on it. . . . It would do, though. One side was clean.

Raising the shade of the window at the head of the bed as far as it would go, Clint re-seated himself by the sick man and, with a torn magazine for a desk, began to write.

"'Dear Sister Maria,' I started it," said Clint. "Now you tell me what."

"Say I'm not feelin' very good," dictated the old man feebly. "Tell her I'd hoped to be able to see her this summer; but it begins to look now as if the end of the summer was comin' quicker for me than I thought."

Thus the old man rambled on, and Clint wrote. Then, with a choking catch in his voice, the old man broke off.

"You sign it!"

The words came in a hiss from Clint. Springing from the chair he pressed into the old man's hand the pencil and, laying the book with the paper on the old man's lap, raised him by the shoulders.

"The light's too dim, son," said the old man jerkily. "I can't see, hardly."

"Well, sign it!" commanded Clint. "I'll get a light in a minute."

The pencil moved in the fingers of the old man. His name mate-

rialized, letter by letter, at the bottom of the sheet. Then the pencil dropped; the form reclining in Clint's arms grew suddenly very heavy.

Clint withdrew his arms, impatiently pushed aside the chair and held the sheet to the window. The signature was well written—legible, authentic. All Clint needed to do was to witness it; he could do that later.

Making it out to Hattie that way, and his being just a witness—that was the best scheme of all: it made it look genuine, all right. He'd tuck the paper away, and when the old man died, he'd bring it out.

"That's the best letter you've ever wrote," was Clint's wildly exultant cry within himself as, the blood pounding in his ears, he pored over the written page in the twilight.

> "Dear Squire Beech," he re-read his own handwriting. "I'm having Clint write this letter to you 'cause I'm feared I wont have no time to have you make me a reglar new will. But I changed my mind an Hattie has bin so good to me and paid my doctor bills and there is my funeral bills an all so I want you should give her the money stead of my sister Maria whose got her penshion. Im gettin Clint to put his name on this like he done on my other old will to be a witnesser sos you know this is reglarly drawed up.
>
> "Bartholomew Davis."

"CLINT . . . Clint!" came a cry from the bed—loud, shrill.

Startled, trembling in every limb, the big man turned to the supine form.

"Lift me up, Clint! Quick!"

From Clint's nerveless fingers the paper fluttered and settled on the chair. His brow streaming with sweat, Clint bent to support the man he knew was dying.

"Hattie!" Clint called chokingly.

"What is it, Clint? . . . My God, what is it?"

The woman was running into the room.

"Get a light — quick — the old man's going!"

A hand over her heart, Hattie came to the bed, darted a feverish scrutiny at the inert form in her husband's arms, and turned away in a confused, searching stare about her.

Clint was barely conscious of her coming; he did not see her go. His eyes were glued on the lifeless clay. Not until she reappeared, a lamp between her trembling hands, and the rays were beating down on the pallid face, was the big man able to lift his eyes.

Slowly, Clint withdrew his arms. His wife, with a convulsive sob, set the lamp on the table. Mechanically, Clint covered the body with a spread that had been at the foot of the bed.

And now came memory flooding back. The will! The old man's will!

"Hattie," cried he tremulously, casting about nervously for the golden slip of paper. "Hattie—do you see it? A piece of writing paper—I dropped it. . . ."

He fell to his knees; groped frenziedly under the bed.

Dazedly, his wife looked down at him. Then, in a sodden monotone, she spoke:

"I don't know, Clint. I don't know. There was a paper on the chair—a piece of writing paper—a dirty piece——"

"Yes," he said fiercely, confronting her, his mouth working. "Yes—where is it?"

"Why, Clint—it doesn't matter, does it?

"There ain't no matches. . . . I used it—for a spill to light the lamp——"

The Dallas Heart

By ETHEL WALBERT

A THREE-PART STORY—CONCLUSION

CHAPTER X

THE SEARCH

JERRY'S confession was of immaterial importance to me, for I did not believe him guilty of any crime, and the presence of the blood on his hands and sleeve when we first met had, for all I cared, been explained away when he fibbed about the slaughter-house. But his account of his uncle's death once more raised doubt and bewilderment in my mind.

If Abner Longwood had been stabbed to death, either by himself or some one else, how could he have come back to life to perpetrate more of his evil deeds? Had I not been with him, so close that I could see he had not been wounded? And was he not now lying down at the foot of the stairs where he had met his second death by a broken neck?

Similar conflicting thoughts must have been in Jerry's mind, for he stood gazing down at the huddled form. He was lost in deep perplexity, frowning and biting his lips. I finally touched him and pointed below.

"Are you sure that's Abner Longwood?" I asked in a whisper. "It couldn't be your uncle if he was killed before."

"That's what's puzzling me, Nancy," he said. "It's a bit bewildering. Yes, I'm sure that's Uncle Abner. But we'll prove it. He had a deep scar on his chest where a bull gored him. If that's there the identification is complete."

I nodded, and when he started down the spiral stairs I followed

close behind him. The oil lamp in the small room was still burning feebly, making the place dimly lit. By its aid we could make out the features of the man easily.

He had met death quickly and almost painlessly, and there was nothing gruesome in the sight. Jerry studied the features silently for a time.

"It's Uncle Abner," he whispered at the conclusion. "I haven't seen him in fifteen years, and he's changed a good deal; but there are certain features that I couldn't forget. At first I might have been mistaken, but not now."

"Make sure," I whispered. "Look for the scar."

He opened the coat and tore away the shirt, exposing the chest.

"There!" he exclaimed, pointing. "There's the scar! No doubt about the identification now!"

I nodded and gazed wordlessly at the scar stretching half across the right chest of the body—an identification mark that could not be easily duplicated.

It was Abner Longwood! Jerry could not be mistaken.

Suddenly I caught my breath.

"Where was he stabbed?" I asked.

Jerry started and jerked back the shirt again.

"Right over the heart," he whispered.

He stopped to wipe his forehead.

"And there's no sign of a wound," he added. "Not a sign."

I was beginning to get hysterical again. The mystery could be explained in only one way. Had Abner Longwood had the power of rising from the dead and miraculously obliterating from his body all signs of his death wound? It was absurd, ridiculous! Yet what other explanation could we give?

"I'm faint, Jerry," I whispered. "Take me away from Swamp Hollow. I can't stay here any longer."

"Poor Nancy!" he sympathized. "It's been a terrible night for you, and I know how you feel. But don't forget the Dallas Heart! We must look for it down here. This is the most likely hiding-place. No one but uncle knew of it, and of course he would conceal it here."

"Or in the cellar below where he imprisoned me," I added, shivering.

"Yes, one or the other."

OUR EYES drifted to the broken trap-door which I had forced after picking the hinges half out of the rotten wood.

Jerry crossed the room and glanced down the dark hole. The ladder was in place just as I had left it. He stooped down and examined the mechanism that controlled the trap-door.

"Ingenious!" he muttered. "Uncle or the builder of Swamp Hollow went to a lot of trouble to fix that up. It works on a spring."

He raised his eyes to mine, and when he saw that I was shivering he came to me and forced me into a seat on the couch.

"Rest there, Nancy! It's all right now. Nothing can happen to you. Uncle's gone——"

"But if he came back to life once he can do it again, can't he?" I said.

"We can't accept that theory," he muttered. "That's absurd. There must be some other explanation of the mystery. But don't let us think of it."

"Jerry," I said pleadingly, "take me away from Swamp Hollow. I'd rather be lost in the swamp than spend the rest of the night in here."

"We'll go," he nodded. "We'll go before dawn. We don't want to be

seen here. Uncle's death will arouse excitement in Wildwood as soon as it's known."

"They won't know right away!" I cried passionately. "He lived here alone. It may be days before any one comes to find him. But I don't care about that! Let us go at once! I never want to see Swamp Hollow again!"

He smiled wryly and shook his head.

"Go before you've accomplished what you came for, Nancy?" he asked.

I stared at him in blank amazement for a second, and then laughed strangely.

"What did I come for, Jerry?" I asked.

"Why, for the same thing I did, I suppose—to get possession of the Dallas Heart."

Now the absurdity of his reply in the light of all that had happened aroused both amusement and bitter reflections in my mind. I was an impostor, although I had come with Nancy's good wishes and consent, and Jerry had accepted me without too close inquiry.

I had all the credentials necessary to deceive him further—birth and marriage certificates of Nancy's mother and early tin-types of her—but somehow I didn't want to use them. I was tired of the whole farce.

And the Dallas Heart! I laughed bitterly to myself when I thought of it. I wasn't even sure if it was a jewel, a string of pearls, or some heirloom that was valuable chiefly for its family associations. Jerry had come to Swamp Hollow to get this thing, and he supposed I was on the same mission.

I wanted to ask him what the Dallas Heart was, and then tell him the whole story of my deception; but thought of poor Nancy dissuaded me. I would have a look at the thing before I confessed.

If it were something really valuable then I would claim half of it for Nancy. That was my reason for being at Swamp Hollow, and I would see the thing through for Nancy's sake.

Jerry had been watching me; but he could not read the conflicting emotions and thoughts that swayed me. I was glad that I could conceal them from him. I nodded and smiled feebly.

"All right, Jerry!" I said. "Search this room and—and—the one below. But I can't help. I must rest."

"That's what I want you to do—rest right here on that couch until I'm through."

I had to close my eyes to shut out the sight of the corpse, and Jerry, understanding, spread a sheet from the couch over it.

After that I grew calmer and waited. I opened my eyes at intervals to watch Jerry. He was going through the place systematically, examining the walls and floor for any secret hiding-place.

When he came to the picture that Abner had moved to expose his peep-hole, I said:

"Take that down, Jerry. You'll find a small hole in the wall. Look through it."

Somewhat amazed by my words he obeyed, and when he saw the tiny hole he applied an eye to it. He was quiet for a long time. But finally he withdrew his eye and looked at me.

"Nancy, that looks right into the dining-room. Uncle, in here, could watch us without being seen."

"I know it, for he was watching you when you were looking for me."

"Is the whole place honeycombed with secret rooms and peep-holes?"

he mumbled. "First, Uncle's portrait, and then the stairs and this room—and now this."

HE THRUST a finger into the hole, but it was too large to go far. He took a lead pencil from his pocket and shoved the pointed end through.

Suddenly there was a tremor as if the wall facing him had been agitated by some violent shaking of the house. Then to our amazement a section of it began to move, swinging outward, revealing a space large enough for one to step through.

Jerry jumped back as if afraid of a trap. But there was no danger. We stood looking through a square aperture directly into the dining-room.

"Another secret exit!" he shouted. "I'm going through!"

He stepped into the dining-room directly over the fireplace. When he got through he flashed his electric light up at the opening, and then back at the swinging panel. The other side showed a huge gilt mirror that had been set permanently into the wall as a part of the original design of the house.

He looked at his reflection in it, and then chuckled.

"Alice Through the Looking-glass!" he exclaimed. "I used to imagine that was the mirror she went through when mother read the book to me. Once Uncle Abner caught me up on the shelf trying to look behind it. He gave me a caning that I never forgot. I see he had his reasons all right."

He laughed softly at his reflections which recalled his boyhood days.

"Don't you remember, Nancy?" he added. "You were with me that day—a little tot."

"No, I don't remember," I confessed honestly.

"I suppose not. You were too young. Well, we've made another discovery. Uncle could get in there either from the upper hall or from the dining-room. Nobody else knew anything about his secret hiding-place."

"But the sliding panels were built in the house before he bought it, weren't they, Jerry?" I asked.

"Yes, I suppose so. Uncle either discovered them by accident or learned of them through the deed. Anyway, he wasn't responsible for them."

"But he used them often," I said. "This room was furnished, and the couch has been occupied."

"Yes, but what for I can't imagine. Perhaps he slept here on dark nights, afraid of being murdered for his money. He was safe enough in here."

The thought saddened me. An old miser living alone and hiding himself at night between the walls for fear of being murdered for his money! It was inexpressibly sad.

Abner Longwood's life had not been a happy one. If a quickened conscience had not disturbed him, fear had. Glancing at the silent body on the floor, I felt sudden sympathy for him.

Jerry climbed back into the room by my side, leaving the exit into the dining-room open.

"If he slept in here," he said eagerly, "he would have kept his valuables with him. The Dallas Heart must be here or in the room below. I'm going down the ladder, Nancy, and look around in the cellar."

"Oh, don't!" I cried. "It's a gloomy, dismal place. It gives me the shivers to think of it."

"Pooh! Don't let that worry you! I'll go alone and report what I find. You might sit at the top of the

ladder and keep that trap-door from springing shut on me," he added, grinning.

THERE was nothing that could restrain him from exploring every part of the secret hiding-place, and I yielded with a sigh to his insistence.

I wanted to get out of the house, but I knew Jerry wouldn't go until he had found the Dallas Heart or was satisfied it wasn't in the place.

With his flashlight in his hand, he climbed down the rude ladder, testing each rung before throwing all of his weight on it. The ladder was weak and unsteady, shaking under his weight, the wood being as decayed in places as that of the trap-door; but Jerry reached the bottom without accident, and I breathed more easily.

From the top I could see him poking around in the cellar-like room. I sat with my feet hanging over the edge of the opening, with my elbows resting on my knees and chin in both hands.

"It's not a part of the cellar," I heard Jerry say once. "It's under the house, but there's no connection with the cellar."

"What is it, then—an underground dungeon for prisoners?" I asked, smiling wryly.

"Either that or a store-house. I believe we'll find the Dallas Heart down here, Nancy."

"I hope so," I returned without any great enthusiasm.

I was growing a bit tired of the search, and for my part I would have abandoned it right then and there. After all there was a limit to what one would go through to help a dear friend, and I had nearly reached mine. Perhaps after all Nancy would inherit a part of her uncle's estate, now that he was dead, and all my efforts in her behalf would be wasted.

"There's a lot of old junk down here!" Jerry called again. "It's a damp and musty place. And to think uncle shut you in here!"

He glanced up with anger in his eyes, and then resumed his explorations. I grew sleepy watching him, and once or twice I nodded. It was nearly morning, and I hadn't had a wink of sleep. I felt dreadfully tired and closed my eyes.

JERRY did not disturb me. He was very quiet. I scarcely heard him at all. Then suddenly his voice was very near, at the foot of the ladder.

"I'm coming up, Nancy," he said in a voice that seemed oddly solemn.

"Find anything?" I asked, waking up with a start.

"No—yes," he stammered.

There was something mysterious in his voice and actions that I could not understand. He climbed up the ladder as cautiously as he had gone down it. When he reached the top he dusted off his clothes and started to close the trap-door.

"That's done," he said in a voice of evident relief.

"What did you find, Jerry?" I asked.

"Nothing—that is, nothing in particular," he stammered and hesitated.

"Nothing in particular?" I repeated.

"No! Come, now, we'll get out of here!"

His changed mood surprised me. Before he had been determined not to leave until he had found the thing he had come for.

Now he was anxious to get out. His face was pale, and his eyes shifted away from me and back again.

I watched him close the trap-door.

There was slowly forming in my mind something that I hated—a suspicion that he had found the Dallas Heart and was trying to conceal the fact from me. Otherwise, how explain his changed attitude?

"Jerry," I said slowly, watching him closely, "did you find the Dallas Heart down there?"

"The Dallas Heart!" he exclaimed, betraying surprise and nervousness. "No! Of course not! What put such an idea in your head? I don't believe it's in the house. Come!"

CHAPTER XI

TATTOOED

MY worst suspicion had been verified to my mind, and it made me sick at heart. Jerry had seemed so clean and manly throughout that it was painful to think that for the sake of a bauble he would turn miser and try to deceive me.

I was convinced that he had found the Dallas Heart, and that when he had seen me asleep at the top of the ladder ugly greed had swept everything else from his mind. I was sure that he had concealed it on his person, and that now he was anxious to get away with it.

It made me sad. I was so disappointed in Jerry. I looked him squarely in the eyes, hoping that he would repent and acknowledge his deception before it was too late. After all we'd been through, it seemed almost monstrous that he should try to steal the thing and deny me a share in it.

His eyes shifted uneasily away from mine. They could not look me in the face, and his hands were trembling.

"We must go," he added in a shaking voice. "The place is getting on my nerves. And it will be morning soon. We mustn't be found here, Nancy."

My lips curled in scorn. After all, greed and selfishness had overcome his better nature, and he would not repent.

"A short time ago you wouldn't leave until you'd found the Dallas Heart, Jerry," I said. "What's changed your mind?"

"Why — er — nothing," he stammered. "I simply can't stand the place. That old dungeon frightened me—that, and the idea of Uncle Abner locking you up in it. Come away! I don't want to see it again."

I smiled back scornfully. I had learned to love him in the few hours we had been together. His kisses had awakened something in me that seemed to spell happiness.

But now I despised and hated him. My idol had been dethroned, and the sight of him now trying to conceal his ugly deception hurt and angered me.

I sat down on the couch.

"No, Jerry, I'm not going," I said calmly. "I want to see the Dallas Heart first."

"But where can we find it, Nancy? I've looked everywhere."

"It wasn't down there?" I added, pointing to the trap-door.

"No, or if it was I couldn't find it!"

He would not confess unless openly accused, and even then I had my doubts. He might brazen it through to the end, and all I could do would be to leave him in scorn and distrust.

He watched me furtively, like a criminal caught in the act. And once more I gave him time to repent, hoping and praying that he would do so.

"What's the matter, Nancy? You

look—look—as if something had upset you or——"

"I am upset, Jerry," I replied gently, "more so than at any other time. I think—I think this is the worst of all my night's troubles."

"What is?" he added, looking queerly at me.

HE WOULD not confess; then I had to speak.

"Jerry, I wouldn't do this if it were just for myself," I began sadly. "I'd go away and try to forget it. But for Nancy's sake, I must speak. She trusted me, and I must——"

"Nancy's sake!" he interrupted. "What're you talking about! Aren't you Nancy?"

I shook my heard slowly.

"No, I'm her friend. I came down here to see what I could do to soften Abner Longwood's heart.

"Nancy's in the hospital. She's poor and lonely, almost friendless, and it will be months and months before she can earn her living again. I'd do almost anything to make life easier and pleasanter for her."

He had been staring hard at me, and I had barely glanced up. But now when I looked I was amused by the expression on his face.

"Not Nancy Lee! Not Cousin Nancy!" he gasped. "Then—then—you're an——"

"—Impostor," I finished for him. "Yes, I'm that. The word applies to me, but Nancy approved of my scheme. Oh," a little scornfully, thinking of his greed, "I wasn't going to run off with anything I could get from her Ancle Abner. I would turn it all over to Nancy."

The full meaning of my confession was beginning to percolate through to his brain. He opened his mouth, closed it, winked and blinked a few times, and then asked:

"If you're not Nancy, who are you?"

"My name's Jane Edgemont, but the name doesn't really matter. You wouldn't know me. I'm Nancy Lee's friend."

"And she told you about the Dallas Heart?"

"No," I replied, shaking my head and smiling, "she never mentioned that. There are a lot of other things she didn't tell me about. When I get back I'm going to scold her for sending me off on such a mission only half informed."

"But you knew about it?" he persisted.

"Only from what you said, Jerry. I wouldn't recognize it if I saw it. What is it, anyway? A jewel? A pearl necklace? Or—or just some cheap heirloom?"

He laughed good-naturedly.

"Well, if you never heard of it I guess you can't be Nancy. I'm glad!"

"Glad!" I repeated. "What for?"

"That you're not Cousin Nancy," he added, smiling.

"I see—or I don't see," I replied, frowning.

"What did you say your name was?" he interrupted.

"Jane—Jane Edgemont, but a name doesn't mean much in a case like this."

"I guess it does. I like Jane—always did. It's a pretty name. And you say Cousin Nancy put you up to this scheme?"

"No, I didn't say any such thing. She didn't want me to come until I'd convinced her there was a chance of making Uncle Abner repent in his old age."

"Uncle Abner repent!" he broke in sneeringly. "That couldn't be done. He didn't know the meaning of the word."

"It seems not," I admitted sadly.

"He died without relenting, and the estate now——"

I paused and looked directly at him.

"Now that he's dead, Jerry, everything goes to you and Nancy, doesn't it?"

"I suppose so. There were no other living relatives—not one now."

His eyes drifted around to the closed trap-door again, and a perceptible shudder seemed to pass through him. I hoped and prayed that he would repent his action and become again the Jerry I had first met and learned to love; but instead he turned to me and smiled.

"We want to get out of this old hole, Jane."

He stopped and looked at me.

"It sounds strange to call you Jane," he added. "I'll have to get used to it; but I'm glad you're not Nancy. You understand, don't you?"

If I understood I didn't want him to think so. I was exasperated and humiliated.

I had not been too particular in resenting his kisses. They had been cousinly kisses at the time, and I had not taken them too seriously. But now, after my confession, they took on a different aspect—at least for me. I had known all the time that I wasn't his cousin, and now he knew.

I was shamed and humiliated. My face became crimson, and I averted it to hide my confusion from him.

"I'll help you out," he added, trying to take my hand.

BUT I jerked it away and sat down again.

"Jerry," I said sharply, "we're not going until we have a complete understanding. I told you I wouldn't say what I'm going to just for my sake. I'd let it pass—forget it. But I must think of Nancy."

He nodded and asked:

"What is it you want to say, Jane? By your looks I should say it was something awful. Another confession?"

He smiled and tried to take my hand again. I drew back, not daring to let him touch me for fear I might weaken in my resolution. I leaned forward and gazed straight into his face. I wanted him to know that I pitied while I condemped him.

"Jerry, you found the Dallas Heart in that room below," I asserted in a slow, steady voice. "You found it and thought you could conceal it from me."

I was a little startled by the swift change that came into his face. He paled, stared at me as if hurt, and then drew back a step. His eyes seemed to bore through me.

"You mean that, Jane?" he said finally in a hurt voice. "You—you —— But go on!"

"I didn't want to believe it, Jerry," I cried. "It hurt me—hurt me——"

"What made you think such a thing?" he cut in gruffly. "Tell me all. I want to know the worst. You're mighty suspicious, Jane. First, you thought I was a murderer and then——"

"That was before I knew you, Jerry," I pleaded. "You must forgive and forget that."

"What made you suspect me? Did you see me find it?" he asked.

There was a lurking sneer in the voice, which stung me to protest.

"No, but I slept for a moment. I was dead tired, and when I woke you were at the foot of the ladder coming up. You were eager to get out and leave. You can't deny that."

"I won't try. Yes, I was eager to get out."

"You were pale and shaking, and you looked—looked frightened or—or upset about something."

"Yes, I was frightened—or, rather, startled," he admitted grimly. "Who wouldn't have been?"

I was a little disturbed by the way he took my accusation. He was admitting everything, and I wondered if I had made a mistake. In a panicky sort of desperation, I cried out:

"Tell me you didn't find it, Jerry, and I'll believe you! Oh, say you didn't find it!"

"Must I constantly be denying that I'm a murderer or thief, Jane, to clear myself in your eyes?" he asked sharply. "Why did you think I wanted to keep my discovery from you?"

"Why—why"—I stammered in confusion—"half of the Dallas Heart belongs to me—to Nancy."

"And you were afraid I was going to run off with it?" he sneered. "You thought I'd steal your share?"

"No," I cried. "I told you it was not for myself I spoke. It was for Nancy. I came to help her, and I would not let you go away with the thing. I spoke for Nancy."

He frowned and bit his lip, staring gloomily at me. Then his expression slowly changed to softness.

"You accused me for Nancy's sake, then?" he whispered. "You didn't want a share of the Heart?"

"No! No! I wouldn't touch the thing! I hate it! It's brought too much misery into the world already. It's like a curse, and—and——"

I stopped, unable to proceed coherently, and covered my face with both hands. Jerry's greed and inconsistency had broken my idol.

He was quiet for some time, and then advancing to my side, he gently removed my hands and looked into my eyes.

"Jane, I believe you," he whispered, "and I'm not angry. Perhaps it was natural. I did act and talk in a way to cause suspicion. But—but if I was startled and shaken down there it—was—was—for another reason."

I LOOKED hopefully and expectantly in his face, waiting for an explanation that would clear him. He seemed greatly agitated and twice opened and closed his mouth before proceeding.

"I found something down there, Jane, that unnerved me. Luckily you were nodding and didn't see me at the time. But it wasn't the Dallas Heart."

"What was it?" I whispered when he paused.

His lips twitched and his face turned a shade paler.

"I didn't want to tell you, Jane, you'd been through so much. I hoped to get you away without explaining. Later when you felt stronger I would tell you all. . . .

"It clears up a lot of things. It makes tonight's strange events simple."

"Go on!" I said when he paused, and I seized his hand.

"You want to hear it now?" he asked tenderly, seating himself on the couch by my side. "It's something gruesome, Jane."

"Yes, I must hear it now!"

He nodded and took one of my hands, holding it steadily while he proceeded:

"I found a corpse down there, hidden under a pile of old clothes," he said quietly.

I shrank back and stared at him.

"It was that of an old man, stabbed to the heart."

"Uncle Abner?"

"No, Uncle Abner's there, dead with a broken neck."

"Who? Why? Oh, please tell me quickly."

"It was Abner's brother—Jacob Longwood—the black sheep of the family."

"I didn't know there was another brother," I stammered, once more realizing how inadequate had been my information concerning the Lees and Longwoods.

"No, of course you wouldn't have—not being Nancy," he added, smiling. "A lot of other people around here didn't know it either. Jacob was a rolling stone, a bad egg, maybe. He and Abner quarreled violently.

"Jacob went off to sea as a young man, and it was not known whether he was dead or alive. None of the family ever heard of him, and he was practically forgotten."

"How do you know it's Jacob down there?" I asked faintly.

"For one thing," Jerry nodded, "he had the family looks. He and Abner were not twins, but they resembled each other quite remarkably. Anyone would have taken them for brothers when they were young."

I nodded and shivered, glancing in the direction of the trap-door.

"For another thing," Jerry went on bravely after a pause, "he carried identification marks on his person."

I looked up inquiringly and waited.

"He ran off to sea, I told you," he added. "Well, all sailors, it seems, delight in disfiguring their arms and bodies with tattoo marks. Jacob was no exception. Both forearms are literally covered with tattooed figures and pictures, and on one arm, under a star, is his name. I saw it distinctly—Jacob Longwood."

I sat in mute silence. The discovery of the corpse in the cellar where I had been was enough to awaken terrible memories. Suppose I had been imprisoned there indefinitely, and in my efforts to find a way out I had stumbled upon the dead man?

The thought was maddening. I should have gone insane, and the mere picture of it made me gasp and turn deathly pale. I covered my face with both hands and shook with a violent chill.

"There, Jane, don't let it upset you so," I heard Jerry say. "I didn't want to tell you. I knew it would shock you. Try to forget it."

CHAPTER XII

INTUITION

I BEGAN to realize how unjust I had been to Jerry in suspecting him, and how kind and thoughtful he had been in trying to get me out of Swamp Hollow without disclosing his gruesome discovery. Instead of being actuated by motives of greed and selfishness, he had made every effort to protect me from another shock.

I sobbed a short time, and then looked up appealingly to him.

"Can you forgive me, Jerry?" I asked.

"Forgive you! Good Lord, Jane, I——"

I think he would have dropped on his knees then and taken me in his arms; but I would not let him. In that house of terror there could be no romance for me. To my imagination it would always be tinged with sadness and fear. I raised a hand and stayed him.

"Jerry," a new idea was coming to me, "if it is Jacob and not Abner who was stabbed, then it was—was——"

"Yes," he nodded, finishing for

me, "it was Jacob's body I stumbled upon when I first came to Swamp Hollow. In the half light it was natural that I should have mistaken him for Uncle Abner. The family resemblance was still strong, and I hadn't seen Abner for fifteen years."

"But who killed him?" I asked in a terrified whisper.

He stopped and frowned, shaking his head sadly.

"We can only guess," he replied, "but there is no doubt in my mind. Uncle Abner was the murderer. He was always quick of temper and very irascible. He hated his brother. His unexpected return here may have alarmed him. At any rate it is charitable to believe that they had a quarrel, and that in the heart of passion Uncle Abner stabbed him.

I shivered again, recalling the picture of the dead man I had seen on the dining-room floor.

"But—how—how'd his body get in here?" I added after a pause.

"Isn't that easily explained, Jane?" he said, smiling gently. "My sudden and unexpected appearance must have frightened Abner, and he fled in here, opening the panel in the dining-room to escape. He could see and hear all that went on in the room. He must have heard me implore the dying man to tell me where the Dallas Heart was, and seen me in desperation shake him."

I nodded understandingly.

"And then you fled."

"Yes, I was a bit frightened at the murder, afraid that if I were found in Swamp Hollow I would be accused of killing uncle. I fled and got lost in the swamp.

"The rest you know. I met you, and the storm came up. When we got here the corpse was still on the floor, weltering in its own blood."

"And Abner heard and saw us?"

"Undoubtedly, through that peephole he saw and heard everything My coming back with you must have frightened him more. He was afraid I would report the murder. Moreover, he knew that we had mistaken Jacob's body for his."

I jumped to my feet, the solution of the whole mystery coming to me.

"Then—then when we were in the library Abner came through the panel and carried the body away?" I cried.

"Exactly! That's my explanation of the whole mystery. The body was carried through here and hidden below. The chances were that no one would ever find it until Swamp Hollow was torn down.

"Uncle Abner knew he was safe. How could we make a charge of murder against him? It would be absurd, of course, especially as the charge would have to be that he was both murderer and victim."

THE MYSTERY was cleared up so that, in spite of its gruesomeness and my recent harrowing experience, I could smile faintly back when Jerry grinned at his last remark. But a moment later I recalled other disturbing things.

"Does that explain the fact, too, that I saw in the dark?" I inquired.

Jerry laughed.

"Of course, I thought that was all your imagination, Jane, but now I believe you actually saw Uncle Abner. It was to frighten you. He was anxious to drive us away from Swamp Hollow. He must have come through the panel in the upper hall and crept into the library while I was in the dining-room."

"And the groans we heard? They were not from the corpse?"

"No, they were also a part of Uncle Abner's plan to frighten us away. If he could make us believe the house was haunted it would

serve his purpose well. I think he played a shrewd game in appearing to you after we thought he was dead and then carrying away the dead body. Don't you?"

I nodded in agreement, for the whole night's experience had been so mystifying that I realized that more than once I had crossed the borderland of superstition and thoroughly believed the house was haunted.

It was a wonder that I had retained my sanity. Even now I shivered as I recalled the diflerent events.

"Of course," resumed Jerry after a pause, "the climax came when you accidentally saw Uncle Abner opening the panel concealed by the picture. It was his own slip. He hadn't expected to find you there when he heard me rummaging around in the tower. The surprise must have been mutual.'"

"Yes, it was," I assured him. "He was so startled at seeing me that I would have had time to escape if I hadn't slipped and fallen against the picture frame."

Jerry nodded and gazed solemnly at me. "I hate to think of the rest —both my experience and yours. If you suffered while in his clutches, I suffered, too. I was nearly crazy, not knowing what had happened to you."

"But he really wouldn't have hurt me, Jerry, do you think?" I asked. "He just wanted to hold me until you left the house."

"I don't know, Jane," he said, frowning. "It's hard to say what a desperate man would do under such circumstances. He knew that you had found his secret hiding-place. Therefore, if any investigation followed you would betray it. He couldn't afford to let you go.

"No, my dear, I don't know what he would have done to you. I don't like to think of it. But there, it's all over! We must try to forget it."

HE ROSE, crossed the narrow room and peered out into the library. The first faint streaks of dawn were shining through the east window.

"We must be going," he said. "I don't like to be found here with two dead men. There will be awkward questions asked, Jane, and there's no reason why we should stay to answer them. We were in no way mixed up with the murder. Let the authorities find out for themselves. We'll leave the house just as it is. Some one will stumble upon the body of Uncle Abner and report it."

I did not rise from my position on the couch, but remained calmly seated on the hard mattress which had served as a bed for Abner Longwood so many dark night.

"Are you going to leave before you find the Dallas Heart, Jerry?" I asked. "Have you given that up?"

"Uncle Abner has a hiding-place for it which may never be found," he replied. "I've searched about everywhere. Of course, a house of this size could have a hundred hiding places for a small thing like that. It's almost a hopeless job. I should have thought of that before."

"How large is the Dallas Heart, Jerry? And just what is it, anyway?"

"Why you—oh, I forgot you're not Nancy!" he laughed. "Well, Jane, the Dallas Heart is a wonderful string of pearls, with a beautiful heart-shaped diamond for a pendant. Old Judge Dallas bought it for his wife, who wore it at a number of balls and dinners, and it was known far and wide as the Dallas Heart.

"The diamond heart alone is worth more than the pearls, it is so large

and beautiful. I imagine that today it would sell for a small fortune."

I listened eagerly, and in imagination pictured the heirloom that had caused so much trouble in the family.

I seemed to see the first owner, Judge Dallas's pretty young wife, wearing it and taking exquisite pride in showing it off. It those early days such family heirlooms were held precious for their associations; but then, as now, greed and selfishness might easily convert a harmless jewel into an unlucky, sinister possession. The Dallas Heart had played its part in disrupting family peace.

"Now you know all, Jane," Jerry continued.

"Everything except——" I began, and then paused. Jerry laughed.

"I believe from the look in your eyes you'd risk your soul to get a glimpse of it. Confess now!"

"What woman wouldn't risk a good deal to see such a treasure?" I returned, smiling frankly and honestly back at him. "And you, Jerry—didn't you risk anything to get possession of it?"

"Yes, more than I should," he admitted. "But now I'm through. The fever's gone."

I regarded him silently with appraising eyes.

"Does that mean you're so sure of it that you can afford to wait?" I added.

"What do you mean by that, Jane?"

"Why, if Abner has no other living relatives, won't you and Nancy inherit Swamp Hollow?"

"I suppose so."

"And all that's in it, including the Dallas Heart?"

"Yes," he smiled, "if it's here."

"You could take your time ransacking the place for it then, couldn't you—you and Nancy?" I persisted.

"Why, of course, but what are you getting at, Jane? You're holding something back, but I can't guess what."

I smiled demurely at him.

"I was thinking," I added innocently, "that somebody else might search the house before you get possession of it and find the Heart. The police, for instance. They would take charge when they found murder had been committed, wouldn't they?"

"Yes, and it's a fact they might stumble upon the precious thing. No telling what they'd do if they found it. They might steal it. You're right, Jane! We ought to look further, even at the risk of being discovered in the house by daylight."

HE SMILED and gazed quizzically at me.

"I believe, Jane, you know something," he said slowly. "What do you know?"

"A lot of things, Jerry, and one is that I don't think a man is good at searching a room for a lost article. Now pause and think. Where would you hide such a treasure in here if you were in Uncle Abner's place?"

"Why—why—I don't know," he stammered, looking wildly around. "Behind the clock maybe, but there isn't any clock in here, or under a brick in the fireplace, but there's no fireplace."

"Guess again," I laughed.

He was growing excited, not knowing if I were making believe or had some actual knowledge of the diamond's whereabouts.

"Jane," he said solemnly, "have you found it?"

"No, silly, of course not! I haven't seen it or touched it, and I don't

know where it's hidden; but I have a woman's intuition."

"A woman's intuition," he mused. "I wonder if there is anything in that, or if it's just common acceptance of an old superstition?"

"Suppose you test it, Jerry?" I mocked.

"All right! Where does your intuition say that I ought to look?"

"Jerry," I said, "if you went into a strange hotel room to sleep and you had a suspicion that sneak thieves were around, where would you hide your money and watch and other valuables?"

"Under the pillow where I could grab them quickly."

He made a dash for the pillow at the head of the couch, picked it up and crushed it between his hands.

"Not in it or under it," he said. "Woman's intuition wrong for once, Jane."

"I didn't say it was there. You jumped at conclusions. Now, would Uncle Abner hide it there?"

"I don't know. I give it up."

"Poor Jerry!" I laughed. "Now listen. From time immemorial the hiding-place for money and treasures, at least according to fiction, has been in stockings, under loose firebricks, behind hall clocks or—or—"

"Where else?" he shouted when I stopped.

I did not answer, but squirmed around in my seat.

"Uncle Abner didn't have a very soft bed to sleep on," I complained. "This mattress is terribly hard and bumpy. It feels as if I'd been sitting on rocks or stones. Just feel here, Jerry. What is it?"

For a second he did not follow me; then seeing something in my eyes that enlightened him he made a dive for the couch and began running his hands up and down the hard mattress.

An exclamation of eagerness escaped his lips. He tore at the mattress cover with both hands, ripping it to shreds, and thrust a hand into the straw beneath.

WHEN he withdrew it he held the Dallas Heart up for me to see.

"Jane! Jane!" he cried. "We've found it! We've found it! The Dallas Heart!"

I was more interested in seeing than in listening, and I hardly heard his words. When he blew the chaff and straw from the precious bauble, a string of pearls, with a magnificent diamond heart, sparkled and glowed in the dim light from the oil lamp, making everything else in the room seem dull and tawdry.

It was such a treasure as kings had fought for and women had bartered their souls to possess. I was dazzled by its wondrous lustre, and Jerry sat there stupefied, holding aloft the precious thing, his lips trembling, his eyes bulging, his hands shaking.

I CAME out of my trance finally.

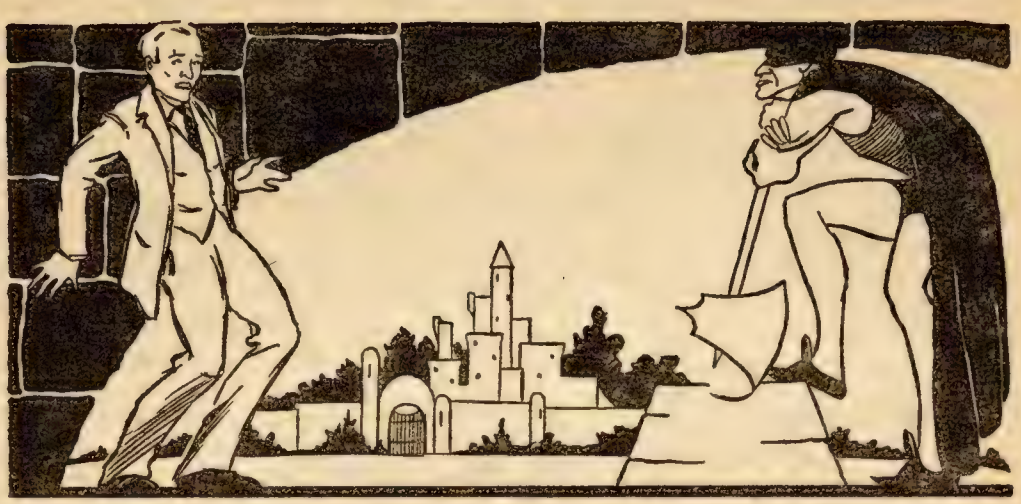
"Put it away!" I commanded harshly. "Hide it! I don't want to see it!"

"Why, Jane, it's wonderful, and you helped me to find it."

"Take it away!" I added in irritation, rising to my feet. "I'm going! It's morning outside. See, the sun's bathing the swamp in a golden glow. Oh, Jerry, it's like a new world after the night! Come, we must go!"

And so we did, hand in hand through the swamp, leaving Swamp Hollow behind with all its memories and sinister associations. I had found the Dallas Heart for Nancy, but more precious to me than any bauble was Jerry's love, which was mine to share with no one.

THE END



The Fourth Ring

By MALCOLM WHEELER-NICHOLSON

A sudden ringing of the bell, once, twice, thrice; a brief silence, and then—but you will have to read this highly colorful tale by Macolm Wheeler-Nicholson, and discover for yourself the grim power which lies behind the reverberations of this mighty bell, when its peals ring out for the fourth time in a medieval castle of old Vienna.

CHAPTER I

PRELUDE

A REALLY good restaurant should be like a well handled orchestra. Its notes should blend into perfect symphonic accord, to the end that the soul be delighted and the senses lulled. It is simply a question of harmony.

Karnthnerstrasse specializes in charming restaurants, but *Das Grüne Kakadu*, of them all, had achieved a pervasive and subtle harmony of its own so that its like could not be found in Vienna.

Soft shaded lights glowed against a background of old rose and silver. The happy, musical lilt of the voices of women merged into the throbbing undertones of violin and 'cello, undertones which often swelled into a high, keen ecstasy, a poignancy of delirious happiness, and, as quickly, receded again to carry on the deeper tones of this symphony of sound and color.

Das Grüne Kakadu combined all these notes into a totality of harmony which makes for contentment and a subdued and intimate joyousness.

Many there were, undoubtedly, who could come under the spell of this concord without surrendering to its charm, who could be exposed to its appeal without a lift of the

spirit, who felt no desire to raise their gaze from the earth and fix it on some far-off pearl-tipped minarets set in clouds of purple foam. But Charley was not one of these.

For the time, the place and, it must be admitted, the smooth mellowness of a bottle of Chateau Suduirut had set him to dreaming dreams and to imagining vain things. Even Thurston's steady stream of homely platitudes had ceased to bother him. But it was time to come to earth for a space, for Thurston was asking him a question and was awaiting his reply.

"I said," he repeated impatiently, "that I could understand the Queen falling for your line of talk and signing up a contract to write for your blamed syndicate, but what I could not understand was how you ever thought up such a stunt. How did it occur to you?" and Thurston gazed at him, perplexed, through horn-rimmed glasses.

"Oh, easy enough." Charley shrugged his shoulders. "It just happens that I like medieval European things. I have a fondness for their color, and, the Queen happens to be the most colorful remnant of medieval Europe left. My eye naturally lit on her.

"I just capitalized the idea, that's all. You go through the same process when you dope out some wonderful new attachment to go on that infernal harvesting machinery of yours."

The orchestra slid into some haunting Gypsy love song, a passionate outburst of wild melody.

"If you ask," said Charley, trying to forget the music, "why I should be crazy about medieval European things, why I get an awful kick out of castles and old armor and swords, I would say that it's because my people were soldiers for centuries and that stuff was part of their daily work. I inherited a liking for it. In the same way that you grow wild-eyed with enthusiasm over new reapers and binders and trick machinery of that nature. Why? Because your people have tilled the soil for countless generations."

CHARLEY watched the thin column of smoke rise from his cigarette and fingered his amber holder musingly for a space.

"We're a complicated bundle of impluses, we modern day Americans, with all sorts of queer inheritances. How much we do of our own volition, and how much our forbears directed us to do, is a big question. It extends into all sorts of things.

For example, you think you will pick out the girl you want to marry. You'll do nothing of the sort. A whole gang of ancestors behind you will dictate whom you will marry, and they'll do all your picking for you."

"They certainly have an awful lot of poor picking to be responsible for," grunted Thurston, "judging by some of the misfits you see caterwauling around. If I land that Czecko-Slovak contract, I think I'll get myself married. But believe me, I'll do my own picking."

Charley looked up in astonishment, Thurston talking of getting married! The atmosphere of this place must be potent, if it could make that old war horse feel sentimental. Thurston caught the look.

"Yes, I mean that," he brazened, "and its about time you settled down, too. Why don't you land some one of the many females that fall for your Grecian profile," he glowered truculently.

"Not for mine!" Charley shook his head, then looked off absently over the heads of the crowd. "If I

ever married it would have to be some one exactly like the girl in the portrait I told you about."

"Yeh? I remember your coming back from that castle raving about some twelfth century beauty——"

"You'd have raved, too; she was a knock-out—enough to make any one sit up and take notice." And Charley looked dreamily into the distance, unseeing and unhearing.

"Words are blamed poor things to describe her," he continued after a space. "She was infinitely more regal than Semiramis, had an air more fascinating than Cleopatra, and all the ladies listed by Villon were no more than last year's snow compared to her."

"Blonde or brunette?" pressed the literal minded Thurston.

"Blonde, divinely blonde, as slim as a young birch tree—and her face!" Charley's eyes grew dreamier. "A face as clear-cut in its perfect beauty as a rose colored cameo, a face that must have shone with glory as——"

"A little powder removes the shine," muttered Thurston, but Charley went on unheeding:

"Her beauty transcended the merely physical, it partook of something divine. It was beauty lighted up from within like a lantern, it was beauty lighted up like a flaming sword——"

"Speaking of being all lit up," Thurston glanced suspiciously at Charley's glass, but his words fell on deaf ears.

"Love fills such beauty with glorious humility, a passion of sweet surrender, with tenderness as soft as the rain at twilight——"

"Drunk!" announced Thurston decisively, "drunk as a boiled owl. "Rave on, old top, you'll feel worse in the morning. Better start tapering off with a little coffee, though."

Charley did not hear him. "Such a girl is a harbor, a refuge, a haven, a floating from the turmoil of life into quiet waters, an oasis in the desert, a——"

"A fly in the ointment, sand in the gear-box, a monkey wrench in the machinery," supplemented Thurston. "If you can get as cuckoo as that about a girl in a painting, I'd hate to see you run up against the real thing. If I hadn't known you to be a crack-brained idiot from your freshman year, I'd say you had a large and juicy collection of bats in your belfry at this moment."

Charley ceased poetizing and gazed dreamily at his friend through a haze of cigarette smoke.

"Some people," he spoke absently, "are like the fish in the sea. They swim around and see nothing with their watery eyes but water. Because they can't see the purple hills uprearing their lofty heads to the blue sky and the silver clouds, they swear that such things don't exist."

"Meaning which?"

"Meaning that there are a lot more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in your mediocre philosophy. For instance, you talk about picking up some girl and getting yourself married. As strange as it may sound, there is undoubtedly in this world, somewhere, a woman who is the only female creature who could put up with your crusty disposition and ingrowing grouches.

"She's fore-ordained for you, somehow, somewhere. Maybe due to some queer ancestral inheritance. Though, I've no doubt, the one waiting for you is deaf and dumb and blind, or ought to be." Charley suddenly grew serious and leaned over the table. "But I'll tell you right now—the one for me is the replica

of that girl in the portrait at the castle of Ehrenburg!"

Thurston gazed at him soberly through his owlish glasses. "If it satisfies you to be in love with a portrait of the middle ages go to it; as for me, I'll pick out something in a 1926 model. But continue, what's the history of this medieval female?"

CHARLEY smoked thoughtfully for a moment. "Queer enough," he said at last. "She disappeared, way back in those early days, and no one ever solved the mystery. Right on the eve of her wedding, too."

The castle's an eerie old place, still furnished as it was in those days. It even has the old bell-cord the lord of the castle used in his judgment chamber to summon his servants. The family executor was one of the most important of these and had his own special ring.

I read all about the family in an old book I picked up in their library. Three rings used to mean a signal to the men-at-arms. If a fourth ring was added it meant a call to the executioner to come to his master, usually to drag some poor nut away to the torture chambers or to cut off his head. The Ehrenburgs were an old family even in those days; Lords of the High and the Middle and the Low."

"How did you happen to run into the place?"

"Don't know. Was out in my car one day and just went there." And Charley looked faintly puzzled himself. "Never heard of it before—it's away off the beaten track."

They sat silent for a space, Charley making designs on the tablecloth with the handle of his fork, his forehead wrinkled thoughtfully. Thurston idly watched the crowded dining-room.

"I wonder," mused Thurston finally, "why head waiters invariably look like ambassadors and ambassadors invariably look like something the cat dragged in?" His eyes were on the tall, dignified maitre-de-hotel bowing in distinguished courtesy to some new arrival.

"Easy enough." Charley shook himself from his brown study. "Head waiters get more practice in diplomacy than ambassadors. Diplomacy is defined as lying in state, and if you'll watch the head waiter's stateliness in lying about those two vacant tables, you'll get the true meaning of the idea."

Thurston watched the tableau vivante; a stocky, bulging shouldered man with a stiff brush of hair sticking straight up, pompadour fashion, arrogantly demanding one of two vacant tables set against the wall on the opposite side of the room—the head waiter all polite refusal.

"His Nibs, the head waiter, has met his match," grinned Thurston. "Greek is meeting Greek and the restaurant business is in danger. The young fellow with the trick haircut is some peevish lad. He's going to have that table or make the welkin ring—and he allows as how's he's some welkin ringer. My money is on the boy with the perpendicular hair, he's going to score on Lord Chesterfield or I miss my guess."

"You've missed your guess, he's taking the other table."

"What do you know about that!" Thurston marveled. "The spirit of Verdun, *ils ne passeront pas.* Have to hand it to him; he must be saving that table for the Rothchilds."

"More likely he's reserving the table for some Archduke who scared up the price of a round of drinks," and Charley turned around to face Thurston again.

Thurston continued to gaze at the vacant table. Suddenly a flicker of

new interest came into his eyes; he sat up straight in his chair, staring with renewed interest.

"That head waiter's certainly going to break in two if he bows any more. The old boy sure has an eye for scenery—you ought to see what's coming to the vacant table. That nightmare lady of yours may be some pumpkins, old-timer, but you should see the dream of bliss that's just come in. If she hasn't got your picture girl stopped forty miles I'll buy the dinner."

Charley turned slowly, and saw two people, an elderly, grey-haired man and an extremely beautiful girl, being ushered towards the vacant table.

"Believe me, she's a sight for sore eyes!" exclaimed Thurston, then his jaw dropped and he gazed in puzzled wonder at Charley who had turned back to face him.

Charley's face had paled, his eyes were round with shocked incredulity.

"She hasn't got the picture girl stopped." He spoke in an awed tone, unusual in him. "Why, she is the living image of the picture girl!" And his voice trembled with a strange excitement.

Thurston raised his eyebrows skeptically and fixed his eyes on the girl. He began to look faintly puzzled. "She's blonde all right, and slim and her face isn't hard to look at by a darn sight. What did you say about her face—something about a rose colored candle? But it isn't a bit shiny, and she doesn't look all lit up.

"Yet she certainly is a comfort to the eyesight. Yep, if anything, you haven't done the lady justice. She comes close to being one pluperfect humdinger. I haven't quite grasped the ins and outs of this system of picking winners, but I'd say offhand, after one burning glance at the lady, that there may be something in your ideas after all."

Which was an extraordinary amount of enthusiasm to come from Thurston.

But Charley had shifted his chair around so as to get a better view. There followed a long silence.

Thurston gazed at him in owlish disapproval. "For the love of Mike! Lay off that love-sick stare, you look like a poisoned coyote. Keep on with that Romeo pose and first thing you know her old man will walk over and wrap a chair around your neck!"

CHARLEY abruptly ended his staring. His eyes were unnaturally bright and there was a high spot of color in each cheek. "Good Lord," he whispered half to himself, "it is she. She *is* a living, breathing person."

"If she isn't a living, breathing person then she's the first statue that ever inhaled soup," commented Thurston dryly. Then his eyes narrowed and he peered intently through his horn-rimmed glasses.

"You're not the only sad-eyed whoofle-bird who's giving her the once over," he announced after a prolonged scrutiny. "There's that dizzy looking square-head at the table next to her, the fellow with the perpendicular hair, who's going to have a badly strained neck tomorrow—and the old bird with her is beginning to get peevish."

Charley followed the direction of Thurston's eyes and, sure enough, at the table next to the girl the heavy-shouldered young man, his square face surmounted by a shock of bristling hair, had half turned his chair so that he was staring directly into the girl's face, rudely and insolently. A faint crease of annoyance etched

itself on her forehead and the impeccably clad old gentleman with her had raised his monocle to his eye and was glaring in turn at the stranger in cold disapproval.

Charley frowned at the man with the bristling hair. "The beastly pig!" he growled, in a tone so charged with anger that Thurston looked at him in quick surprise, but as quickly looked away again, for things were happening.

The elderly escort had risen from his seat by the girl, bowed to her in excuse, and had marched determinedly to the rude stranger's side. Standing erect and looking very military, he commenced speaking to the young man of the bristling hair. The stranger rose languidly and made some reply, his eyes heavy-lidded with insolence. Whatever the words, their effect was electrical, for the stiffly polite old gentleman quivered like a hound at the view hallo, and then reached forward with the swiftness of a swordsman at the lunge and smacked the stranger across the face with his open palm.

Thurston suddenly felt Charley rise up beside him. "Lay off, Charley, you blame fool, that's a private war." But Charley was up and away, striding swiftly across the floor, his face set in implacable lines, but with a queer dream-like stare in his eyes, as though he were walking in his sleep.

And he was none too soon. The insolent stranger turned almost purple with sudden anger, his eyes glared half insanely and he leaped at his grey-haired assailant with a hoarse growl, burying his fingers in his throat.

There was a scream from the girl and the music stopped on a sudden note. From the other tables came excited shouts. Charley, impelled by he knew not what instinct, quickened his pace and fairly propelled himself against the tall barbarian. He loosened the fellow's grip with a glancing blow on the cheek bone.

The man straightened up and turned on him, fury in his eyes. Charley drew his breath, coiled himself up like a steel spring, and then lunged, his fist landing with all the stored up energy of shoulder and back squarely on the fellow's jaw.

There was a dull thud, a grunt and a gasp, and the pompadoured stranger flung out his arms and then plunged headlong with a crash, falling over a table and smashing the crockery as he fell.

CHARLEY stood for a space, rubbing his knuckles. He heard faint cries of "Bravo!" There was a sudden influx of green clad policeman, much excited waving of arms on the part of the waiters, apologies from the unperturbed maitre-de-hotel, and then an exceedingly polite policeman with a notebook asked questions. After which, the rude stranger, his pompadour dishevelled, was helped to his feet and hustled toward the door by the minions of the law.

On one side of him Thurston was swearing: "Charley, you double-distilled, triple-dashed, blankety blank trouble-hunting idiot." And in front of him the unruffled figure of the elderly gentleman was bowing and saying: "Accept my gratitude for your so chivalrous aid, and the thanks of my daughter."

Charley's ears pricked up and the fog of fighting began to dissipate. He found himself being introduced to a flushed face and the most divinely soft pair of eyes he had ever seen, eyes that seemed to increase in size until he could see nothing else in the room. From afar off he heard Thurston in conversation with her father, and heard his own polite

words sounding as from the lips of a stranger.

Nor did he know what she said. He only remembered, afterward, the notes of her voice echoing in his ears like the over-tones of some silver bell, and somewhere, away off, the orchestra pouring forth the wistfulness of Tosselli's Serenata, like blissful accompaniment to his own tumultously joyous spirit.

And then she and her father were leaving and the world seemed gray indeed until, in quick dazed wonder, he saw her turn and caught a flash of such warm friendliness from the depths of her eyes, that it dazzled him, and he had to be led back to his own table by Thurston, scarcely knowing how he got there.

"Well, that's one way of introducing yourself." Thurston handed him a glass. "Have a drink—you look woozy. And for Pete's sake, take a bracer. You look like a candidate for the nut factory."

"What was her name?" Charley gave a sudden gasp and half rose, wild-eyed and anxious.

"Sit down, sit down," soothed Thurston. "People in your sad state don't worry about names. Next time you meet her just tell her that you really are Mark Antony in spite of what people say."

"What is her name—where——"

"Then don't forget to tell her how much she reminds you of Cleopatra. It'll go over big, and the squirrels will all be happy." Then, sensing that Charley meditated personal violence: "Her name, let's see, her old man gave me a card; where did I put it?" And after fishing around in all his pockets, he pulled forth a square of pasteboard. He looked at it for a moment in puzzled wonder, whistling in astonishment, and then sat bolt upright in his chair.

"Either **I'm** a cuckoo bird in a cocoanut tree or my glasses are on the blink. What was the name of that castle where you were smitten by the lady in the picture? Ehrenburg?"

Thurston cocked a wary eye at Charley who had half risen in his excitement. "Believe it or not," and Thurston stared dumfounded at the pasteboard again—then passed it to Charley's clutching fingers. "There it is—*Colonel Count Max Bohm von Ehrenburg!*"

CHAPTER II

OVER-TONES

SOME people have intuitive feelings about telegrams. Charley was like this. When the envelope was delivered to him in the Buda-Pesth Hotel, he dreaded opening it. And, when he did finally tear it open, the typewritten words pasted in straggling fashion across the blue sheet fairly leaped at him:

Return immediately
THURSTON

What the dickens was up? Why should Thurston be telegraphing him. Their mutual business trails never crossed. They had no interests in common important enough to warrant telegraphing. There was only one thing he could conceivably be impelled to telegraph about—and that was the girl.

A certainty came over Charley that something was wrong in her neighborhood. What could be the matter? Was she sick? Had she been hurt in an accident?

As he frenzidly packed, in order to make his train, swift, glinting pictures of the few hours he had spent with her rushed through his mind—that first evening when he had moved quickly and irresistably to protect her—the rosy glow that

stole upward to her cheeks—the pride of her and the sweetness—the dizzying rush and swirl of his soul rising to meet hers as their eyes met and clung. What had they said? Silly things, perfectly conventional things, but oh, the glory of her presence and the dear delight of her nearness! Only, as in a haze, did he dimly remembered the stately courtesy of her father; it was she that was stamped on his mind like the image on a freshly minted silver coin.

And could he ever forget the haunting, questioning look in her eyes as he rushed away, his heart singing, forced to hurry to Buda-Pesth to finish some work? How the hours had dragged! And now they were dragging even more painfully as the train hurried toward Vienna. Never did a train seem so impelled to stop and delay and hem and haw about getting to its destination. His nerves were shot to pieces when finally he arrived and hurried down the platform, where he ran plump into the waiting Thurston.

"I figured you for this train," Thurston nodded, peering at him curiously.

"What has happened to her?" Charley burst out without preliminary.

"Oh, you've seen the papers, then?" Thurston appeared almost relieved, as though an unpleasant job had been done for him.

"Papers? I've seen nothing in the papers. What is it? Tell me!" Charley's voice trembled with anxiety.

"Why," and Thurston looked his concern, "she's disappeared!"

Charley dropped his bag and his face suddenly grew grey and old.

"Disappeared?" he echoed, in a whisper.

"Yes," Thurston looked at him, concerned, "she's been lost nearly a week. The papers have just got hold of it."

"Lost?" whispered Charley, as one thunderstruck. Then, with a return of energy, his voice grew sharper. "How? When? Where? For God's sake loosen up and tell me."

"There's something queer about it." Thurston shook his head. "The papers haven't told the whole story. All that's come out so far is that she was last seen around that crazy old castle belonging to her family. But they've searched for her nearly a week now without any result and have nearly given up hope."

"Was she alone? Who saw her last? What——"

"She was out motoring with her cousin—a long, lank drink of water—the young fellow who hangs around her a lot. His car broke down somewhere near the castle. While he was down in the dirt fixing it, so he says, she strolled away. No one has seen her since."

"Which way did she go? Did they search the woods?"

"Searched the woods, dragged the streams, arrested everybody within ten miles, including the cousin, and raised Cain generally. They even searched the castle, which is about a quarter of a mile away from where she was last seen. The papars have revived that story about the other girl who disappeared in the middle ages. The girl whose picture you saw in the castle. The old Count thinks it's a curse on his family and has nearly given up hope."

"What does the cousin say?"

"Admits that they quarreled and she turned him down. His story is clear enough. They don't seem able to get anything on him. They've had him before the magistrates on several occasions, but he tells the same story every time. They finally

released him for lack of evidence. They even arrested the caretaker of the castle, but he was so dumb they let him go. He swore, however, that he hadn't seen her. They examined some woodcutters working in the forest, but they were so honestly frightened that they let them go as well. My idea is that the cousin has been up to some rough stuff. I didn't like the looks of that mutt the first time I saw him twirling that monocle of his."

"Get me a car right away, will you, old sport?" Charley interrupted brusquely, his forehead wrinkled and his eyes brooding.

"You are not going to the castle?"

"You're darn right I'm going to the castle."

"Well, I might as well trail along," sighed Thurston.

THE atmosphere of the village inn of Ehrenburg was none too cordial. These simple villagers had recently been harried and harassed by minions of the law, until they were suspicious of any stranger within their midst. The departure of the two Americans was watched impassively by them, but there was a lowering hostility patent in their sullen bearing.

The air was heavy with the threat of an approaching storm as Charley drove their car up the narrow road. The approach of evening, intensified by the gathering storm, was still further deepened by the solitude of the dark forest through which the road wound, half-buried in fallen leaves. So heavily was the ground carpeted with these latter that the track became more and more uncertain.

"Looks as though we were off the trail," Charley announced grimly, after they had run the car into an impasse formed by the toppled trunks of several trees.

"First time I knew we were ever on it." Thurston, heavily sarcastic, gazed around at the desolate scene.

There was only one thing to do and that was to chance it on foot They floundered through soundless forest in which every footfall was silenced in the carpet of decaying verdure, a place which seemed to be perpetually sunless, a strangely silent woodland in which birds never sang.

The thunder was rumbling threateningly when suddenly they came out on the brow of a hill and saw, below them in the narrow valley, the forbidding looking mass of the castle.

It loomed a vast gray bulk of stone, silent and menacing in that desolate place, rearing back sullenly from the marshy banks of an oozy stream that eddied in oily whorls and heavy, silent ripples about the castle base.

"Childe Rolande came to no darker tower than this one," said Charley, as he shivered slightly from the damp chilliness of the woods behind.

"You said it, Charley! Kid Rolande would have thrown up the sponge and passed out of the picture right here and now!" and Thurston gazed with disfavor on the valley below.

Charley stared with a sinking heart at the sinister mass of the castle below, crouched like some huge animal in the bleak valley. There was no eddy of smoke from its chimneys, no sign of human life on its towers and battlements. Its desolate windows stared at him with all the fixed and vacant intensity of the eyes of a blind man.

He was uneasily aware of these windows, as they slipped and climbed down the hillside. A drizzling rain

was falling, making the going treacherous. The windows still glared at him as they crossed the dark stream on a causeway of rotting planks that seemed to shudder as their feet sunk into the worm-eaten softness.

Try as he might he could not fight off an increasing depression of soul that dragged at his footsteps like a veritable ball and chain, a gloomy sense of futility and foreboding, intensified by the unredeemed dreariness of the scene around him.

He hoped for surcease from the staring windows when at last he arrived under the shadow of the castle walls. But he was doomed to disappointment, for the walls were pierced low on their swelling flanks, with long and narrow loopholes from which, he imagined, unseen eyes were watching his every motion.

"That's the worst looking rat-trap I ever set eyes on," volunteered Thurston uncomfortably. "What a lovely country home it would make for a retired undertaker!"

The outer gate was closed, but a small door set within the larger portal gave to their touch and they entered a damp tunnel which pierced the walls and led into the interior of the castle. They hurried through this, to find themselves in the courtyard of this immense silent pile.

The court was surrounded by what appeared to be separate buildings, each four or five stories in height, with overhanging balconies in medieval style.

The uncomfortable sensation of being watched returned to them tenfold with these tall houses leaning forward menacingly and forbidding, grim disapproval in every line of their beamed angles.

THAT most oppressive of all silences, the stillness of untenanted human habitations, weighed on Charley like a suffocating blanket. The place was like a town suddenly hushed by a destroying plague, with the last corpse being carried away to the echo of rumbling footfalls in the empty streets.

"Might as well start something," said Thurston as he approached the largest and most imposing of the doors in front of him, picked up the great brass knocker and let it drop.

The massive lion's head on the knocker smashed against the door and shattered the overbearing silence with a heavy crash. Startled echoes awoke in the silent building before them and the great buildings around the court seemed to look down at these two presumptous strangers arrogantly.

What an infernal racket the brass knocker made! It continued to echo with reiterated clatter through the farthest halls and corridors, just as the distant rumble of thunder continues in the summer mountains long after the storm has passed.

A strange distaste for what the door might disclose came over Charley. He drew back, watching the oaken panels half fascinated, ready for he knew not what horror to be disclosed.

Why was he there? This was something he could not easily answer. He had not attempted to analyze the instinct that sent him speeding to hammer at the door of this castle nor had he reasoned out any program of action. He was there and that was that.

"Come on, step on it," Thurston objured the silent doorway. "We're not bill collectors."

It was almost with a feeling of relief that Charley heard the echoes die down finally, their farthest reverberations stilled at last in distant rooms and far passageways.

They both started suddenly as a new sound broke on their ears. Dim footsteps were stirring somewhere deep within the bowels of the building. From afar off the firm tread started slowly and moved heavily and inexorably toward the upper regions. Dully and fatefully it approached, its steady march growing louder as it came near the door.

They waited, Charley quivering, Thurston uncomfortable. The undeviating tread paused, just inside the entrance. There was a long silence during which they fidgeted uncomfortably.

Glancing up, by chance, Charley saw with a shock that they were being inspected by a watery blue eye that gazed at them unemotionally and unwinkingly from a peephole above the knocker. The staring eye continued its scrutiny so long that Thurston grew restive.

"Put your mangey dog back in the manger and don't look at me that way, stranger," he apostrophized. "As soon as you've finished looking us over you might try opening the door," he added irritably.

The eye disappeared. There was a slight pause followed by the rattle of bolts and bars. The door slowly swung open.

Charley recoiled involuntarily at what the doorway disclosed. For something, not unlike an enormous human dumpling, stood there, fearsome in its bulk in the half-light. Close inspection revealed a huge figure covered with a shapeless mass of flesh, crowned with a short neck supporting a bullet head, which rose turtle-like from the immense shoulders, the whole upheld by fat legs and finished off by ridiculously ineffective looking arms and soft infantile hands.

Closer study made this apparition seem even more remarkable. There was something infantile about the round, smooth, hairless face, something immature in the porcelain blue eyes, the pouting baby-like lips and the childish expression of the features.

"Hello, Kewpie!" ejaculated Thurston, amazement shining from his round glasses. "You certainly ought to give up this job and go into vaudeville—you'd make your fortune on the Keith circuit."

The creature stared, uncomprehending, and shook its head.

"Ich bin hierher gekommen um einige Skizzen von dem Schlosse zu machen," Charley announced in his best German, figuring that a desire to make some sketches of the castle would subject them to the least amount of suspicion.

The fat caretaker, after a long blank stare, began to nod his head. Faster and faster he nodded, until, to Charley's gaze, he seemed about to shake it loose from its moorings. Then the broad face broke out into the instant cheerfulness of a baby's smile. Charley almost expected him to crow delightedly and clap his hands. The contrast was startling enough in all truth.

"Ja, Ja," he nodded vigorously, *"herein, bitte,"* and hospitably beckoned them to enter, throwing the door wide open.

CHAPTER III

INTERMEZZO

HE interior of the castle was dark and bathed in the musty gloom of ancient things. The huge caretaker waddled before them, leading them through a succession of badly-lighted corridors, their walls blackened by the smoke of many ancient flambeaus,

into high ceilinged, tapestry hung chambers. These were filled with heavy, massive furniture and stands of arms, and strewn about with weapons and hunting trophies, deer antlers and great tusked boar heads surmounting crossed javelins.

Thurston gazed curiously at the armorial bearings of the family, the Golden Boars' Heads of Ehrenburg, which were carved on the backs of chairs, woven into tapestry and embroidered on the walls. "Some trade mark," he grunted, "accept no substitutes, name blown in the bottle."

Pendant from the ceilings were banners, jagged oriflammes and bannerets, their flaunting crimsons, purples and blues faded by time into soft pastel shades of old rose and pale lavender and neutral gray.

There was something eerie and ghostlike about the place, impelling Charley unconsciously to walk on tip-toe and speak in whispers. Progress through the halls seemed, to his overwrought nerves, to start strange rustlings and faint whisperings around and about. Try as he might he could not forebear glancing occasionally over his shoulder, so strong was the sensation of being followed.

The picture gallery intensified the feeling of ghostliness a hundred fold. Here he felt himself the cynosure of hundreds of staring eyes, the coldly disapproving eyes of stern-faced knights in armor, of courtiers in doublet and hose, of judges and ambassadors, of princes of the church in scarlet and ermine.

Here and there occasionally was the likeness of some feminine figure, stiff and angular in starched ruffs and laces, who seemed to outstare in haughtiness the portraits of the men, were that possible.

In spite of the cold hostility of these unsmiling portraits of the dead and gone, Charley pressed on through this over-populated room—pressed on to where a great, full-length portrait hung bathed in the soft glow of light from a rose colored window.

Here he came to a full stop, his hands nervously clenching and unclenching as he studied again the portrait of an extremely beautiful girl, a girl strikingly like the one he had last seen in Vienna.

This girl in the picture was dressed in medieval costume, something in pale green and violet, with a girdle of jewels about her waist and a golden circlet about her amber colored hair, an intricately fashioned golden circlet in which rested jauntily a gay peacock feather.

He heard a low whistle from Thurston, and turned to find him staring in wonder at the picture and scratching his head thoughtfully.

"You'll have me playing in the fields with the daffodills next, Charley. Sometimes I think you're picking things out of the air and sometimes I think I am. Doggoned if we're both not getting woozy. But she sure is a dead ringer for the beautiful blonde girl and you can't laugh *that* off!"

They turned suddenly to find the gross caretaker eyeing them inscrutably. "*Ein sehr hübsches Mädchen,*" remarked Charley carelessly, and they turned away. The caretaker vouchsafed no reply, but led on.

"What ever became of the bird who was going to marry that girl? What was her name? Gunhilde?" and Thurston jerked his thumb backward over his shoulder, pointing to the medieval portrait.

Charley frowned in an effort to remember. "Nearly as I can remember the old chronicle states that he searched diligently for weeks

through the castle. Then one day he suddenly came running out of some big room, the Judgment Hall, I think they called it, shouting 'all is lost! Too late! Too late!' and ran out of the castle and was never seen again."

They made their way up a broad staircase. At the head of the stairs the caretaker threw open two great doors.

"*Hier ist der Gerichts-saal,*" he announced.

"The Judgment Hall!" Charley echoed his words, startled, and Thurston's head jerked up quickly.

"Thar's gold in them there mountains, stranger," quoted Thurston in a whisper. And a strange thrill of excitement ran through Charley. Somehow, in some vague way, he felt that the trail was getting warmer.

THE great hall was dominated by a massive, heavily carved throne-like chair that rested on a dias. Above it, supported by crossed spears, hung the folds of a velvet canopy, its original crimson faded by now to an indeterminate mellow brick color.

Charley felt a curious and inexplicable tightening of his scalp as he entered the hall. He felt an overpowering sensation of having been in that room before, a sensation that amounted to a certainty.

Reason told him that he had not seen this room on his first visit to the castle and that he had never before been in this out of the way corner of the world. But something stronger than reason made him powerless to combat the queer sense of familiarity which this hall wrought in him.

He was certain that the great high-backed chair belonged in that one spot and no other. He seemed to know, instinctively, that the stands of armor, spaced about the walls like silent sentinels on guard, stood each in its proper place and were familiar objects.

So strongly impressed was he with a sense of familiarity with these surroundings that he even felt the lack of some essential thing in the chamber, some article that he knew should be there and was not. What it was exactly he could not remember, try as he might.

But here, evidently, was the place to start to unravel the mystery of the tragedy that had befallen him with the disappearance of the Viennese girl. Drawing pencils and paper from his pocket, he informed the caretaker that he wished to do some sketching and that it was unnecessary for him to remain.

Nodding violently, the man left, clumping his stolid way down the broad stairs. They listened for several minutes, until the receding beat of footfalls withdrew into some lower part of the castle, and finally ceased.

Quickly putting pencils and sketching pad away, Charley turned to Thurston.

"Thirsty," and he spoke as in a trance, his eyes strange and unseeing, "Thirsty, this room holds the answer!"

"Yeh?" Thurston glanced around the silent hall. "Well, it isn't talking loud enough to strain its vocal cords." But without further ado he followed Charley's example and began to examine the place.

It was circular in shape, conforming to the curve of the tower which housed it. The walls of this great tower were well over six feet in thickness, so thick that the narrow windows were set into embrasures, making a small passageway from each window into the room.

"You have to watch these old

places for secret passageways," Charley announced.

"Secret passageway," Thurston sniffed. "There's no secret passageway built that a rough-neck American carpenter couldn't find in twenty minutes." However, contempt for these medieval appurtenances aided them not one whit in their search for something more in this room than appeared on the surface. There seemed only one entrance or exit—that was the great door by which they themselves had entered.

"Yet Charley felt that it was from this room that all the trouble started; it was from here that the girl of ancient days, she of the twisted circlet of gold and the nodding peacock feather, had disappeared, to be followed centuries later by the glorious girl of Vienna. Of this he was certain. Why or how he knew it, he did not pause to analyze.

"Look here, Thirsty," he said suddenly, after examining a section of carved screening near the door, "I've got a hunch."

"Yeh?" Thurston drawled again. "I might say hunches are the only flaw in what otherwise might be your very wonderful character. But shoot — what's the latest brain storm?"

"Don't ask any questions but do as I ask you, will you, old sport?" pled Charley, and Thurston after a long ruminating silence nodded.

"I think there's a telephone of some sort in the village. Go back there and ask the old Count to come down here immediately."

Thurston started to object, then observing the burning intensity of Charley's eyes and the grave seriousness with which he spoke, he shrugged his shoulders and nodded.

"But don't be a triple-dashed idiot and get yourself sewed up in a mess of trouble, old sox," he grunted from the doorway. Charley heard his footsteps as he descended the stairs, heard his shout for the caretaker to let him out. Then came the slam of the great entrance door and all was silent again. He was alone. It was time to get to work.

HE WORKED silently and breathlessly, examining each crack and cranny. The place exercised a most odd effect upon him. It was as though the room waited, tense and breathless, for him to divulge its secret—as though it were anxious to render up its mystery.

Suddenly he decided it was time to cease laboring and to commence reasoning. With this in view he made for the great chair itself, stepping up on the dias to seat himself.

As he set foot upon the top step he paused suddenly, then leaped backward and downward with a startled cry.

Some cold object had touched him on the forehead, something dank and clammy with all the chilliness of death itself.

He started, almost paralyzed, for a space; then grinned sheepishly.

"Shame on you, old horse," he admonished himself, "to shy at a pretty little thing like that," and advanced again to examine more closely the object which had so completely upset him.

It was the intricately carved and chased silver handle of a faded crimson bell-cord that hung easily within reach of anyone sitting in the judgment chair. Seating himself he recalled the story of this bell and speculated on the number of wretches whose doom might have been sealed by its aid. He remembered the story of the three pulls on the bell-cord, the call to servants or the men-at-arms, or the final pull that meant a call to the executioner to hurry to

his master; this last usually spelling torture or death, or perhaps both, for some poor devil.

He thought of the fateful pause between the three rings and the final dooming fourth—a pause filled with such frightful potentialities for life or death. He visualized the castle as the bell was rung in those far-off days—the cessation of all activity within the walls as men paused to count the strokes, even the stout men-at-arms stopping their dicing long enough to watch the executioner, like some evil yellow spider, creep from his lair underneath the castle—and the return of the hated figure, in his queer yellow cloak, as he went shambling back to the death chambers with his white-faced prey.

Examining anew the really beautiful workmanship of the silver handle of the bell-cord, he observed that it carried, appropriately enough, a grinning death's head as its central figure.

Idly fingering the bell-cord handle as he mused, he harked back a little to a half-forgotten eulogy of the hereditary executioners of Ehrenburg, a eulogy that he had come across in the musty old history of the family.

The trade had descended from father to son, generation after generation, and carried with it certain honors and rights from the lord of the castle. It carried, as well, the detestation of all other dwellers within the walls.

The chronicle of the hereditary executioners of Ehrenburg only contained a single instance of disloyalty to their liege lords. This concerned the backsliding of one Heinrich, who, as the old chroncile gravely stated, had had the temerity to raise his eyes to the daughter of the house—and had been severely punished for his forwardness.

Charley considered this incident and its bearing on life in medieval times. Then his thoughts lead him to the relations of liege lord and executioner. They must necessarily have been very confidential relations. There were so many people who must have been put away quietly in those days for policy's sake. An inconvenient guest; mayhap a churchman whose knowledge might have spelled danger, or a visiting nobleman from some competitive robber castle or an emissary from some court, whose presence it was necessary to do away with quietly.

Yes, there must have been need of confidence in the relations between executioner and liege lord. He probably called the executioner into conference at all sorts of queer times. Probably the executioner had his own secret passage.

Suddenly Charley sat bold upright—of course there must be a secret passage from this Judgment Hall to the torture chambers. And Gunhilde, that maiden of the long ago, had undoubtedly disappeared from this room—and there was a story of a certain executioner who had paid court to one of the daughters of the house!

He saw, as in a flash, the whole story of the disappearance of that long ago Gunhilde—her wedding night—the queer, hated, twisted figure of the executioner, mad with jealousy, stealing to the Judgment Hall—Gunhilde running away from the wedding supper to hide mischievously from her lover, the executioner's insane rush of jealousy, the secret passage—*that* was the mystery of Gunhilde!

But what had that to do with the disappearance of his Elsa, this modern day goddess who had looked into his eyes with the result that the world for him could never be the

same again? He did not know; except that he had a queer, stubborn feeling that he was on the right track.

That stubborn belief had convinced him that Elsa had disappeared in this old castle in some manner. And he knew, without further reasoning, that in this room somehow lay the key to the puzzle.

He must find some exit from this place other than the great doors. There was a secret passage, of that he was certain. The question was, where was the most logical place for it? Where would he put a secret passage if he were some ancient seignior, building a castle? Why, in those great thick walls, of course! So far so good. That narrowed the field of search.

CHAPTER IV

CRESCENDO

AFTER half an hour's steady sounding of walls and tapping of stones, he returned to the centre of the room, baffled. He had covered every inch of the place.

He sat again in the judgment chair, his head in his hands, plunged in deep thought; his brain twisted itself in every conceivable direction to puzzle out the mystery of this chamber. He found himself thinking of lanterns, queer old-fashioned lanterns of bronze and horn-shell.

He impatiently put the idea from him and sought to return anew to the search for a solution. But some subconscious impulse in him was forcing his thoughts continually back to lanterns.

He rose from his chair in an effort to be doing something other than sitting there like an idiot musing about old-fashioned lanterns. He firmly put them out of his mind and began again to search the room. He had thoroughly covered every inch of the inside of the walls.

Then he suddenly remembered the strange castle in England, that for centuries had shown some forty-three windows from the outside whereas it had never been possible, search as they might, to find more than forty-two inside. Why not examine the outer walls of the room?

With a dogged hopelessness he forced open one of the windows and leaned out, scanning the walls as far as he could see. They gave no encouragement. Their grey, lichen-covered surface was unbroken except for a small iron bar that jutted out of the solid masonry near the window ledge and slightly below it.

He withdrew his head again, disappointed. The absolute blankness of the wall was discouraging. There was nothing on its smooth surface except a small iron projection. He wondered idly what it was for.

Suddenly he raised his head with a start. The iron bar was for a lantern to hang on! Of course! This tower gave directly on the woods and the lantern was put there, an old-fashioned iron and horn thing, to guide returning hunting parties. And why had his brain been so actively concerned with lanterns? This was worth looking into.

HE WENT back to the window and examined the iron bar closely. There was nothing exceptional about its appearance. He grasped it in his hand. It seemed solidly embedded into the masonry of the wall. He tried pulling it both upward and sideways without any results.

Disgusted with himself for being so gullible, he gave it an angry shove away from him and downward. Then he stood paralyzed for one swift second. The iron bar gave

slowly and easily. He heard a sharp click behind him. Turning, his jaw fell. Where before had been the solid unbroken wall of the small passageway leading from the window through the thickness of the wall to the room, there was now framed a small doorway. Looking more closely he saw that a door had swung inward, disclosing a narrow flight of stone steps that led downward into the darkness.

He put one cautious foot on the first step of the descending stairway. It was sound enough. The next and the next were just as sound. Emboldened, he stepped heavily and confidently on the next step only to have it tremble beneath his tread. The hair rose on the back of his neck. Everything grew darker, deepening swiftly to impenetrable black.

The door behind him swung shut. It was several seconds before he determined the reason. Of course, this step was the counter poise for the door. The minute he put his full weight on it, it had swung to. Something within himself told him there was danger in the next few steps, and he maintained a careful watch hereafter, striking match after match and examining each step before trusting his weight to it.

It was well that he did so.

For the steps came to a sudden end and he found himself poised above a yawning pit. He pulled his searching foot back with a sick feeling at the pit of his stomach, and peered down into the void below him.

It was so black that the flickering light from his match scarcely illumined a few feet. However, he saw enough to realize that anyone falling into that bottomless hole would probably stay there for good.

The air was heavy and damp and stale in the passageway. In the silence that surrounded him like a blanket he could hear the faint lap, lap of water far below.

It looked like an impasse, an end to his hopes. A sinking sensation came over him. What if this were the sole meaning of the secret passageway? Had a horrible death in this pit been the end of those two glorious women of this ill-starred family? The thought filled him with panic. A cold sweat broke out on his forehead.

Then reason came to his aid. Why should such pains have been taken to conceal this bottomless pit if that were its only reason for being? Of course not. The pit must have been put there to render useless just such expeditions as his. It was intended as a form of polite discouragement to anyone venturing to solve the secret of this passageway. Hope surged up within him again and he started to explore.

Striking matches, he felt of the walls carefully, seeking for some new secret door. His search was rewarded by nothing except a torn finger-nail. Stubbornly he lighted more matches, peering down into the pit before him.

Suddenly he smiled joyfully. He had seen something just as the match died down and went out.

Hastily he lighted another. Yes, there certainly was something. Below and to the right of the last step was a small shelf. It was so placed that a person having knowledge of it could easily find it with his foot in the darkness. A person unaware of it could search long and hopelessly if he had not already fallen into the void. The pit was broader than the tunnel. This shelf must be a way around the wall of this secret gallery.

He lost no time in testing his theory. He balanced on the narrow foot-

ing, squeezing close to the stones. Edging carefully around, he found himself in a new entrance. The passageway had simply doubled back on itself around a false wall. It was easy enough to negotiate once you knew the way.

The steps led downward until they came to a level where the way broadened out and the roof grew higher. Above him narrow loopholes let in some dim light, which enabled him to see a short distance ahead.

Suddenly the route he was following turned sharply to the right. He found himself facing a small massive door painted a vivid scarlet and set deeply in the end wall.

Halted by the arresting scarlet of the door, he concentrated his whole being in trying to picture what lay beyond. Not a sound disturbed the silence of this subterranean corridor. The door stood dour and grim as though daring him to solve the riddle which lay beyond its bulk. So quiet was the place that he imagined the beating of his heart could be heard reverberating like the booming of savage war-drums.

Drawing a deep breath he put a shoulder to the door. It gave noiselessly to his weight. He could see nothing within but impenetrable blackness. He opened the door still further and stepped within, fumbling the meanwhile for matches.

A vast imponderable bulk struck him. He found himself struggling crazily in the blackness. Somewhere there was the clank of a chain. In the fog that gripped his mind he heard a woman's scream.

THERE was the ringing as of a thousand bells in his ears. He fought in a detached sort of way, hearing, as from afar, dim screams and hoarse animal-like bellows, and his own breath rattling in his lungs. He struck again and again but his blows were like the blows in a dream. His arm drew back and moved forward —the motion seemed to take eons of time and to land without any sensation of solidity. Something was endeavoring to throttle his wind pipe —he was being bent back, back, back, until he ceased to care. The noise of many bells in his ears grew momentarily louder. Then he felt himself drifting, as on some smooth stream, the bells growing fainter and fainter.

A delicious feeling of languor stole over him. He was content to drift.

But the bells would not be stilled. Their ringing increased in loudness. The smooth stream on which he was gliding grew of a sudden violently agitated. Light flashed in his eyes. He blinked and twisted his head to avoid their glare. He became aware of the steady throb, throb of some mighty engine. It might be his own heart—he was too tired to puzzle it out. A gray haze seemed to have settled over everything except where the lights blazed.

The myriad flashing of these blazing beacons slowly began to gather into one great illumination. This dwindled and receded until he saw it finally as a smoking torch that glowed on a wall a few feet from his head.

In attempting to shield his weary eyeballs from the glare he discovered that his hands were bound.

A vast shadow impinged on his consciousness. The vague, formless bulk of this resolved itself into the figure of the fat caretaker of the castle. Incurious, he observed that the huge body of the man was alive with energy. Fantastically enough, the fellow seemed to be skipping around like a child—giggling now and then as at some good joke he was about to play.

Gradually he became aware of another figure within the range of his

vision. At the same time he heard a peculiarly horror-stricken series of screams.

It was some time before he connected the two phenomena and realized that the screams were proceeding from the slim figure of this person. The actions of this latter puzzled him. Whoever it was moved forward a few feet, stopped with a jerk and screamed. Then it would recede only to repeat the maneuver.

He was puzzled by it all and found himself suddenly weary beyond all measure. If he only could sleep. He closed his eyes, a move he quickly regretted as he seemed to be sinking rapidly through countless miles of space—sinking so rapidly as to make him violently dizzy.

He opened his eyes again. The light from the torch threw flickering shadows on the bulk of the caretaker. It was certainly the man himself, the queer child-faced, fat individual who had admitted him to the castle. Looking beyond him and to one side he saw something that hazily piqued his curiosity. He dismissed it as part of this crazy dream, but was impelled to look again.

It took form as a queer whiteness against the shadow of the wall. There was something vaguely disquieting about the outline of this white blur. It slowly resolved itself into a skeleton. The bones hung against the wall and seemed to be leaning forward. Then he saw that the form was held up by a steel band around the middle. Queerly enough the ghastly, sightless head was crowned with a circlet of gold from which drooped dispiritedly a bedraggled peacock's feather.

He was worried by this last detail and tried to reason its import. A circlet of gold and a peacock's feather. Didn't the girl of the portrait, she who had disappeared so mysteriously in the middle ages—didn't she have a circlet of gold and a peacock's feather?

And what was that other figure? He could hear a voice now and something strangely familiar about it set his heart to beating. Pleading, sobbing hysterically, begging, her voice was unmistakable! It was Elsa's voice, the thrilling tones of which he had last heard on that incomparable Viennese night.

His head cleared as if by magic. He found his brain alert and keen again. He twisted at the rope that bound his hands, tried to loosen the bindings only to find that they cut deeper into his flesh. The shadow of the vast bulk of the caretaker fell over him. He saw the man approach the one torch and light another from it, sticking it into a second bracket on the wall. The added light cleared up the dusk of the room.

It was shaped like a triangle. In one angle he saw Elsa's figure, her eyes on him in horror and fear. In the other corner were the white bones of the golden circleted skeleton.

In the centre of the room stood the great bulk of the caretaker, a huge axe on his shoulder. He stared curiously at this axe. There was something familiar about it—then with a cold chill he recognized it. It was a broad-bladed and vicious looking affair, the long sweep to cutting edge proclaiming it as an executioner's axe.

CHAPTER V

APPASSIONATA

THE caretaker was talking wildly. His eyes were bloodshot, and staring insanely, as he stood in the centre of the room. The light from the two torches on either side of him glinted from

the glittering steel of the axe, whose edge he was testing with his trumb. Suddenly he turned and hurried away to the far corner of the room, the apex of the triangle.

He reappeared from the shadows dragging something. It was a heavy wooden block with two cup-shaped depressions on either side, and a heavy ridge across the centre. It was an execution block stained black, and gleaming evilly with ancient blood.

The caretaker pushed and pulled it into the centre of the room.

The girl screamed again and again, her hands stretched out imploringly toward the huge maniac.

She saw him push the block into place, saw him step across to the opposite corner and half lift, half drag the young American over the floor to the block. Once there he lifted him to a kneeling position, his hands tied behind him.

Then he picked up the axe, balancing lightly on his right arm, while with his left he slowly and inexorably forced the head of the young American into the cup-shaped depression.

She saw the young American struggle, then she screamed again with horror as the great caretaker struck him viciously on the side of the head with his fist, and saw the body of the young man slump unresistingly, his head resting quietly on the block. The caretaker spat on his hands and grasped the handle of the axe, which glittered with vicious red from the torch light.

The light from the torches threw a vast shadow of the caretaker on the wall, a gigantic swooping shadow that moved with startling swiftness. The girl crouched on her knees, moaning in horror.

The details of that scene would be etched in her memory to her dying day. The great bulk of the caretaker, axe in hand, the dully gleaming block with the helpless figure kneeling against it, head outstretched, the flickering light from the torches now flaring in brilliance and now dying down to half light.

She saw the caretaker raise the axe slowly. She buried her face in her hands, moaning.

The deathly stillness that brooded over the cellar room was suddenly broken and she raised her head, startled. A strident clamor of an ill-tuned bell had wakened harsh, sudden reverberations.

She saw the caretaker pause, and look upward, his mouth hanging open, a look of almost ludicrous surprise on his face.

Again came that strident, jangling ringing. It was followed by the steely clash of metal against stone —the caretaker had dropped his axe on the floor. He was still gazing upward, a look of fear distorting his broad features strangely.

Again came the clangor of the discordant jangling bell. There was a smothered sob and she saw the huge bulk of the caretaker topple to its knees, the man was trembling like a leaf, his hands raised as in supplication.

It suddenly flashed on her with the white sharpness of lightning that the bell had rung three times! A chill of superstitious fear sickened her. The ancient bell had rung three times! What could it mean?

Her whole soul and body and every quivering nerve in her system strained for the crash of that fourth ring. The shifting light from the smoky torches threw fitful gleams on the bizarre scene—the ancient block, with the body of the young American slumped over it unconscious, the quaking bulk of the caretaker, half raised from his knees,

his straining attitude so marked with fear and horror that he was trembling like a leaf.

She could hear her own heart beating like a throbbing engine. The faint "whisp, whisp" of the burning torches could be heard between the stertorous breath of the caretaker, as he gasped and panted like an over-driven horse. Would the bell never peal forth with that fourth ring?

Whole centuries seemed to drag past in stately progress. It seemed to her that she had been waiting there for countless ages. A dumb gripping paralysis slowly began to steal over her soul—the bell would not ring—the caretaker would finish his grisly task. She bowed her head hopelessly. Her eyes closed and her body swayed forward.

THE fourth ring of the bell burst on the cellar room with a crash as of a world breaking into atoms.

The reverberating uproar was followed by a strange cry from the caretaker, a long strangling moan, bestial in its retching pain. The man stumbled to his feet.

"Ich komme, Herr Graf, ich komme!" he sobbed and lurched forward, arms outspread as though to keep from falling. The girl heard a door slam open, heard stumbling footsteps and queer sobbing noises receding into the distance, until all was silent again.

Her voice came to Charley as from a vast distance.

"Come to me, come!" she was saying. It seemed the first note of sanity in a wildly insane nightmare.

He whipped his flagging spirits into shape and struggled toward the sound, dragging himself along with many pauses to wait for his strength to return.

Through it all, as in a fever, her voice encouraged him. Somehow he found her. And somehow, in the darkness, protecting arms enfolded him and quick, fluttering hands comforted him and he felt the warmth of wet tears dropping on his face. He was very content to have it so.

The intolerable pain that burned his wrists was miraculously relieved and he found his hands freed. He slowly opened his eyes and caught his breath.

For he was being held tenderly in the girl's arms. The fragrance of her hair was in his nostrils. She was leaning over him. In her eyes was such a flood of tenderness, such a sweet solicitude, such a vastness of lovely anxiety that a man might go through his whole life and not see the like of it. The splendor of it was like a battle-cry to his beaten spirit.

He came dimly to understand that she needed help as well. Gently taking his nerveless fingers, she placed them on a steel girdle that encircled her waist and from which a chain ran to the wall. She helped him rise and directed his steps, leading him like a child, to the full length of her chain and pointing out to him a key that hung, diabolically cruel, just out of reach of her outstretched fingers.

He nearly toppled over with the effort of reaching up for the key, but at last placed it in her hand.

Her arm was about him and her shoulder supported him as they made their way into a larger hall. Charley hazily noticed that the place was full of queer instruments, among which he recognized racks and pinions, thumbscrews, any quantity of fetters and chains and other appurtenances of the torturers' trade.

Suddenly they were surrounded with a welter of strange people, among them he dimly recognized

Thurston and the old Count, her father. Tears streamed from the Count's eyes as he held his daughter fast.

How pale she was! In a dream-like sort of way, Charley felt his hands being grasped by the white-haired old gentleman and felt a wave of goodwill and gratitude enfolding him. Willing arms aided him. Somehow he found himself in the Judgment Hall.

There seemed to be many people about—especially before the great seat under the canopy. A vague, formless bulk lay prone on the floor. Incuriously he found himself recognizing the caretaker and knew, somehow, that the huge maniac was dead.

A drink of some heady liquor was tendered Charley, and the stinging fire of it cleared his head sufficiently to understand odd phrases that were murmured around him.

"Plunged in, foaming at the mouth"—"dropped dead in front of the Count, who was resting in the big seat"—"no one knows, probably heart failure"—"always been a little queer; has been getting worse lately—"

And then *her* voice, a bit unsteadily: "But did you pull the bell-cord, father?" And he found himself hanging upon the reply.

"I cannot remember," replied the Count, in slow thoughtful accents, "I had it in my hand as I sat, after searching vainly for the young American. It is very likely that I pulled it unconsciously—or it may have been some power that used me as an instrument to prevent this poor insane creature from doing harm."

Her father's eyes clouded. "Strange that his line should come to an end in this fashion. You know," and he turned to Charley, who was now leaning on Thurston's arm, "his family have served mine for countless generations. It is said that in the ancient days his ancestors were the hereditary executioners for the Counts of Ehrenburg."

There was a silence after this, then a vast buzzing of conversation, through which he heard the Count's voice again. "Poor Gunhilde, chained up there to die—it is too horrible, but I cannot help feeling, also, sorrow for that unhappy young Falkenstein who was to have married her—"

Charley heard his own voice, sounding flat and weak in his ears. "What did you say his name was—the young man who was to have married Gunhilde?"

"Falkenstein, Karl von Falkenstein, a young nobleman from a nearby family," and the happy old gentleman turned to answer some question put to him.

THE car was an interminably long time in coming. Elsa was helped into the seat beside him and he put his arm around her, protectingly, before all the world. The old Count, her father, being wise in his day and generation said nothing. But Charley, half-dozing, heard his voice above the sound of the motor: "And this so-brave young man who has returned you to me—I have not heard his name?"

Charley knew that she could not answer. With eyes half-closed he essayed to save her that embarrassment.

"Name is Falconstone, Charles Falconstone," he muttered, "people live in Boston, United States, America. . . . " His words ran together drowsily. "Came to America from Austria . . . long time ago . . . must have been . . . long time ago," and he leaned his aching head against the golden amber of her hair, pillowed against his arm.

Detour

THE Dinka, a tribe of blacks living along the White Nile, have a legend to the effect that formerly earth and heaven were connected by a path, up and down which men used to pass at will, and that this path was cut off in the following unfortunate manner:

The god, Dengdit, who the Dinka believed to be the divine creator of all living things, had a wife named Abuk. It seems that this particular husband trusted his wife sufficiently to bestow upon her the privilege of creating mankind. One day she was busy fashioning men and women from a bowl of fat. Softening the fat over the fire, she moulded figures out of it with her hand just as a potter moulds with wet clay.

As each person was completed in this fashion, he or she passed down the road to earth, for, naturally, the creation of life took place in heaven, the home of this god and his wife. While she was at work, her husband passed by and seeing what she was about, cautioned her against his various male relatives, with whom he was not, just then, on speaking terms. But his wife did not heed his warning and went out to fetch some wood, leaving the bowl of fat simmering on the fire.

Just then her brother-in-law strolled up and seeing the bowl, out of pure mischief he drank a bit of the fat, threw some of it on the ground, and moulded that which remained into preposterous figures, with eyes, noses and mouths grotesquely bunged up and perfectly useless as humans. Then, fearing the wrath of the deity, who could not be expected to smile at this travesty of creation, he retreated to earth by the usual road.

On her return, the god's wife was perfectly furious to discover the misshapen figures and she hastened to inform her husband of the trick played upon her by his waggish relative. Dengdit immediately rushed to the path leading to earth, but found that it had been rendered impassable.

For the culprit, fearing pursuit, had with the aid of the beasts of the field who were his friends, dug at least a dozen converging paths all emanating from the direct road leading from heaven to earth. Dengdit, mystified by the veritable labyrinth of paths and, not knowing which one was the correct road to earth, became furiously angry. His breath came quick and hot and he blew with all his strength upon what he deemed the center of all this confusion.

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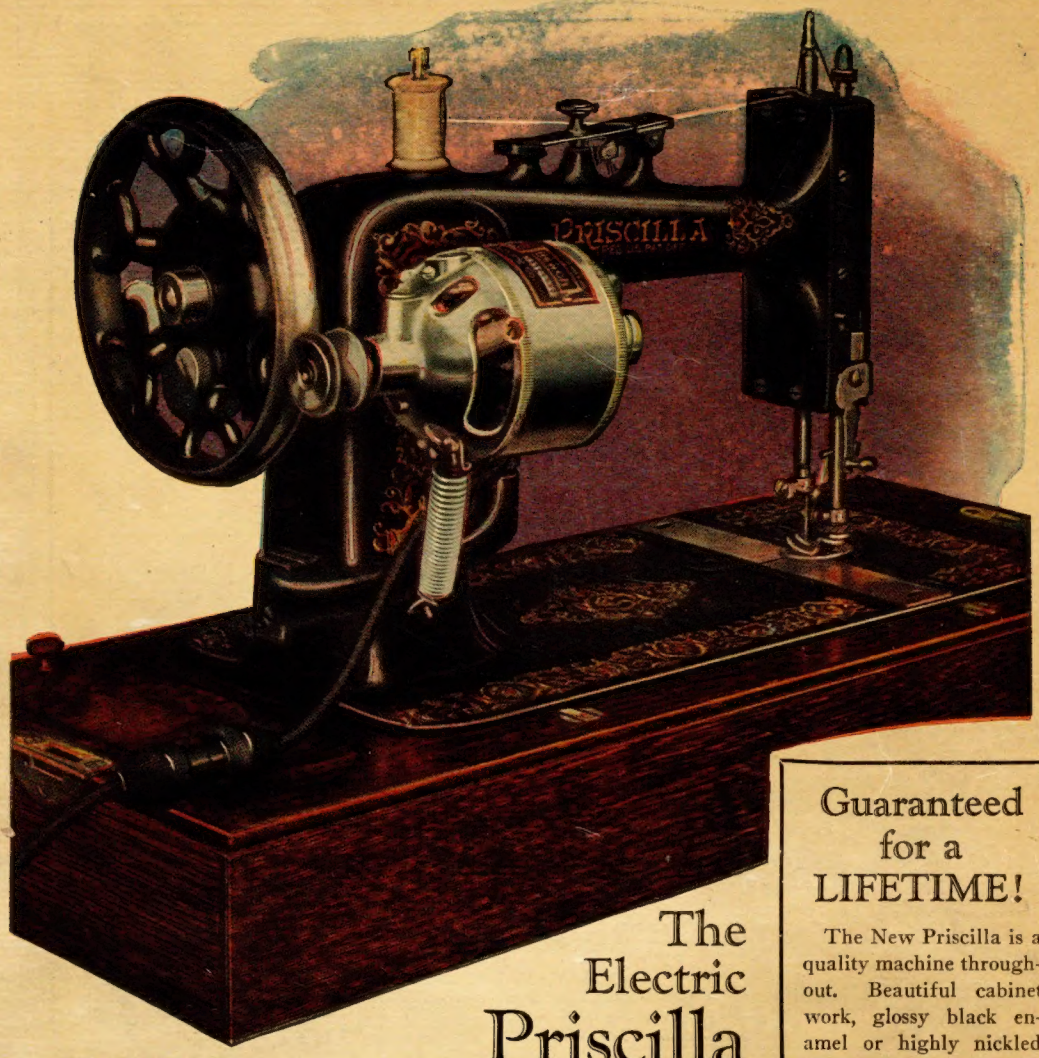

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